Scripted Journeys

van Nuenen, Tom

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A Study on Interfaced Travel Writing

[T]his desire, even when there is no hope of possible satisfaction, continues to be prized, and even to be preferred to anything else in the world, by those who have once felt it. This hunger is better than any other fullness; this poverty better than all other wealth.

C.S. Lewis - *The Pilgrims Regress*

Scripted Journeys

A Study on Interfaced Travel Writing

PROEFSCHRIFT

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aan Tilburg University
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door het college voor promoties aangewezen commissie
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door

Tom van Nuenen
geboren op 3 november 1984 te Vessem

Promotores: Prof. dr. Odile Heynders
Prof. dr. Ruud Welten

Copromotor: Dr. Piia Varis

Overige leden van de promotiecommissie:
Prof. dr. Jan Blommaert
Prof. dr. Yra van Dijk
Prof. dr. Emiel Krahmer
Prof. dr. Karina Oskam-Van Dalen
Dr. I. Hermann

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In Voltaire's classic satire *Candide,* the titular hero strays upon the fabled land of El Dorado. Struck by its beauty and peacefulness, Candide remembers the teachings of his mentor, Dr. Pangloss – a parody of Gottfried Leibniz. He taught the rather convenient doctrine that we live in the best of all possible worlds, and accordingly, that the castle he and his student happened to live in was the finest place on earth. Pangloss would have swallowed those words, Candide concludes, had he seen these sights. "Il est certain qu'il faut voyager."

A thesis on travel writing cannot and should not come about from within the confines of an academic office. It was written in an Italian train, an American motel, a Turkish coffee shop, a Norwegian cabin, an Australian beach, and an Indonesian café overlooking the rice fields (the latter cliché being a personal favorite). Let us not become jaded. Travel breeds inspiration. Any critical inquiry needs to be prefaced by that fact.

It is not these trips, however, but the stable presence of others that I am most grateful of. I thank my supervisor and mentor, Odile Heynders, who taught me how to look across disciplinary and intellectual borders. I thank my co-supervisors: Piia Varis, who tirelessly read and commented on my work – enhancing the whole of it in the process – and Ruud Welten, for pointing out many routes to think about travel philosophically.

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Roadmap

This dissertation provides an analysis of the procedures, discourses and semiotics of travel in algorithmic culture, and the forms of identity expressed and performed therein. The central concept that will be developed is that of the *script*: this concept suggests that the moniker of 'travel writing' is unfit to describe the computationally sponsored transactions, interactions, and processes of identity that may be traced in the discourses of current-day travel.

Scripts arise from the digital mode of relating to the world, in which the conventional authorial subject is fronted through a virtual and representational persona, ideological logic is intertwined with Boolean logic, and natural language is complemented with formal language. These are all algorithmic effects appearing in the field of textual production, meaning-making, and social activity. The notion of the script implies that, within computational ecologies, users may register or subscribe to certain identity templates, formats, or ideal types – and conversely, to cast off their alternatives. Scripts, in other words, are what allow the user to instrumentally compile an identity from the flows of information and capital that we call algorithmic culture. We will see that this compilation not only happens explicitly, through linguistic interaction, but also through the procedural pathways that determine the directions and patterns of interactions. Instead of 'travel writing', this dissertation thus engages with the scripted processes of reading, writing, and executing travel.

The empirical content of this study is formed by seven published or to-be-published articles in peer-reviewed journals. Each section includes two papers, which are connected in terms of the medium that they focus on – that is, blogs, platforms, and games. As results of scholarly production, the papers are presented in the form in which they were sent to each journal. This means that some overlap and repetition may be found in the overall line of argumentation, and that the layout and referencing styles throughout the papers is not homogeneous. The latter is indicative of the heterogeneity of style in academic research, and serves to underscore the nature of this study: it is a collection, not a monograph. This is also a result of the social reality of acquiring a PhD, which is to an ever-decreasing extent a solitary endeavor: it is typified by a series of connections between colleagues, universities, mailing lists, Facebook and Whatsapp groups, shared Dropbox folders, and so on. These new possibilities often lead to co-authored publications, which can also be found in this dissertation. Bringing other voices into the discussion (in this case, voices from a context of sociolinguistics and of ritual studies) is itself an integral part of doing research in increasingly compact

humanities faculties and with colleagues sharing an interdisciplinary curiosity. This approach hopefully also shows how different analytical vectors (literary studies, socio-linguistics, ritual studies, game studies and so on) may contribute to understanding an analytical topic in a rich, diverse way.

Understanding online phenomena, as a shared and co-authored endeavor, is a matter of adopting different processes in order to try to capture a phenomenon from different angles. The goal is then perhaps not to try and 'keep up' with the ephemeral sites we find online. Many scholars have voiced concerns about this ephemerality: as Geert Lovink puts it, "PhD research cannot keep up with the pace of change and condemns itself to capturing vanishing networks and cultural patterns […] society is way ahead of its theorists" (2011: 6, 7). Nicholas Mirzoeff, equally critical, brings in the problem of acquiring and learning the digital tools to understand the digital realm, asking: "How do we write a history of something that changes so fast it can seem like a full-time job keeping up, let alone learning the software?" (2009: 241). But the goal is not to join in with the continuous reshuffling of media, platforms, and interactions that take place there. The goal is to see the structure, the patterns, the underlying tendencies of these seemingly disparate fluctuations, picking a beginning and an end date, and accepting the limitations of such research. We should not strive for a real-time, streaming type of research, but for precisely the opposite: to go against the grain of the hyperactively spinning gears of society, which in so doing cultivate memory loss.

With regard to the matter of knowledge dissemination, publishing with authors and in journals from different disciplines, while keeping the same research object in mind, implies that one can reach different audiences, and involve them in the discussion of a single phenomenon. This is one of the central points of this dissertation: that the workings of travel writing, traditionally an object of literary studies, may also be disclosed in the fields of symbolic interactionism, digital humanities, game studies, and so on. Further, one journal in which was published, *Cogent Social Sciences*, adheres to an open source principle, signaling the slow but steady distribution of research sponsored by public funds to that wider public itself**.**

This study is divided in three analytical parts, which are preceded by a general introduction and a methodological discussion. Section two attends to blogs, which stand closest to traditional novelistic travel writing: professional and 'canonical' blogs are investigated, created by self-appointed travel experts. The pivot is the construction of traveler identities and concept-metaphors (such as the professional traveler and the 'life expert'). These identity figures are being positioned vis-à-vis the archetypical tourist type, and the procedural format of the blog offers several pathways for this identity construction. In section three, we move from personal to aggregate platforms, understood broadly here as sites involving user-generated content and a strong integration with other apps or software. These platforms are argued to be part of a broader development in computational policy that emphasizes fluid and deeply personalized algorithmic systems over a more static database of personal stories. The focus here rests on online peer-to-peer platforms, which offer a myriad of anecdotal

discourses and metrics in order to supply their user-base with identity content (such as constructing oneself as a 'local' through the employment of sites like *Airbnb* and *TripAdvisor*).

Finally, section four considers cases of an overtly scripted nature: representations and experiences of travel in video games. We will emphasize the procedural dynamics of these applications, and their affordances regarding the construction and representation of traveler identities and canonical travel figures that also appear in the other papers in this thesis, namely the pilgrim and the anti-tourist. The reader might further note that within each of these three sections, the first paper will tend to emphasize structural and socially co-constructed components of its travel scripts, whereas the second will tend to take a perspective of individual creativity, performance and production. The sections are each closed by interludes, which connect the issues that have been discussed in the papers more explicitly to the broader frame of travel scripts, while providing suggestions for further research. Finally, a concluding discussion will summarize key findings of the study pertaining to knowledge of travel in algorithmic culture, and draw some implications from these findings.

While the different platforms, modes and genres under analysis by no means form an exhaustive (or even representative) list within the field of algorithmic travel representations and performances, they arguably do constitute a network of telling or paradigm cases (Gill 2014), constituting a vivid or strong instance of a particular pattern of meaning that can help us to recognize similarities in other cases, and to see travel writing as travel scripting. Max Weber, borrowing from Goethe, has once called this approach one of *elective affinity*: tracing the ongoing and continuously shifting 'pattern of the relations between things' (2005 [1930]), and showing that certain phenomena are to simultaneously exist in order to conjunctly function in a certain way.

In terms of languages, the reader will note a strong emphasis on the English-speaking world, which signifies the social and global pervasiveness of English as *lingua franca* in the tourism sector. Many different tourism-related speech acts – hotel check-ins, touring dialogues, and so on – occur in English, often in a simplified manner in terms of lexical range and syntactic complexity to enable language users of different backgrounds to communicate for professional, recreational and institutional purposes (Crystal 2003; Maci 2010). An ideological reason, Francesconi (2014: 28) notes, is that English often serves as a language of prestige: it associates products or services with values of cosmopolitanism, dynamism, and glamour. Be that as it may, the linguistic partiality in this study places constraints on its inductive potency. It is still estimated, however, that the patterns of relations we can recognize in these case studies are indicative for a certain modern attitude that permeates the Western world.

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CHAPTER 1

Preparation

To boldly go

'Your best source of fun' reads the tagline of *9GAG*, a popular online meme repository on which some 23 million users are submitting pictures and captions.[1] Yet the platform's feed of images also contains a plethora of cultural anxieties and discontents. One might, for instance, have stumbled across a Sad Frog meme[2] called *We are the middle children of history.* The image, involving a rather melancholic looking toad, conveys a particular sense of disappointment: one of the main epistemological affordances of travel – to explore and experience the unknown – has disappeared, and we, late modern globetrotters, will not live to see its resurrection. The bold Impact font might suggest insouciance, and the catchphrase may be playful – but the message is sober.

The meme, by its nature, is mimetic: in it, we hear echoes of many a contemporary author coming to the same conclusion. Claude Lévi-Strauss, in his travel memoir *Tristes Tropiques* (1955), both admits and distrusts his thirst for the real and exotic when writing:

> Je voudrais avoir vécu au temps des *vrais* voyages, quand s'offrait dans toute sa splendeur un spectacle non encore gâché, contaminé et maudit; n'avoir pas franchi cette enceinte moi-même, mais comme Bernier, Tavernier, Manucci ... Une fois entamé, le jeu de conjectures n'a plus de fin. (1955: 42, emphasis original)[3]

The anthropologist fully realizes that his nostalgic gaze, which assigns all 'real' voyages to the simple past tense, can be cast ever further down into history. And while he knows how misleading it is to ascribe such qualities to the past, he remains enticed to do so all the same.

Decidedly less ironic about his nostalgia is cultural historian Paul Fussell (1980) who, as tourist masses surged around him after World War II, disconcertedly mourns

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[1] Memes, in this understanding, are popular and continuously restructurable images for extensive creative user engagement in the form of parody, pastiche, mash-ups or other derivative work (cf. Shiftman 2011: 190). See https://www.facebook.com/9gag for current user statistics.

[2] A variation on the *Pepe the Frog* meme: see http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/feels-bad-man-sad-frog

[3] "I should have liked to live in the age of real travel, when the spectacle on offer had not yet been blemished, contaminated, and confounded; then I could have seen Lahore not as I saw it, but as it appeared to Bermer, Tavernier, Manucci ... There's no end, of course, to such conjectures" (1961: 44).

the "young and clever and literate" (1980: vii) travel writers between 1918 and 1939, in what he calls the "final age of travel" that was the interbellum. And popular philosopher Alain de Botton (2008), in a characteristic self-assessment, finds himself struck by a 'combination of listlessness and self-disgust' on his first visit to Madrid. Thinking of the discoveries of Alexander von Humboldt on the South American continent, De Botton realizes that "in Madrid everything was already known; everything had already been measured"; his own fruitless lot was to be confined to habitual touristic responses to the sights encountered, and deep-rooted beliefs about what constitutes their value. Notwithstanding the varying irony of their nostalgia,[4] all of these authors point to the realization that may haunt many a modern traveler: that which was once called exotic, strange, or unheard of, has now become an ossified truism. If there are no 'new worlds', there is no commensurate 'epistemological disjuncture' (Whitehead 2002) in which the things we may get to know abroad and the things we know at home are fundamentally disconnected.

It is hard to imagine how Marco Polo, Xuazang or Ibn Battuta would respond, being told that – for some privileged division of first-world citizens at least – the other end of the world is about a dozen mouse clicks, some keystrokes and a red-eye flight away. The late modern touristic infrastructure has become increasingly efficient, calculable, and affordable for the rising middle classes – yet to our choir of critics, it is equally dull, as it no longer holds the epistemological promise of experiencing the unfamiliar, uncanny, strange, exotic, dangerous or inexplicable. In MacCannell's words, "[t]he act of sightseeing is itself organized around a kernel of resistance to the limitations of the tourist gaze" (2001: 31). That is, every traveler is aware that what is encountered or gazed at is calculated and fabricated, leading them to search between the cracks of such encounters for unexpected minutiae or particulars (MacCannell 2001; cf. Welten 2014). Of course, as will become clear throughout this inquiry, the tourism industry goes to great lengths to reassure its customers that authenticity has not become a complete impossibility – rather a semiotic challenge, a *game*, in which great effort is put into marking and certifying authentic sites and spaces which the tourist subsequently has to recognize and seek out.[5]

Anticipating the touristic displeasures of rationalization and calculation over a century ago, Max Weber developed his concept of *Entzauberung* to understand

[4] Lévi-Strauss especially knows all too well that being a traveler in ancient times would also mean to miss out on the modern information that enriches a cultural trip, noting that he is caught by two options: "tantôt voyageur ancien, confronté à un prodigieux spectacle dont tout ou presque lui échappait – pire encore inspirait raillerie et dégoût; tantôt voyageur moderne, courant après les vestiges d'une réalité disparue." (1955 : 43) ("Either I am a traveller in ancient times, and faced with a prodigious spectacle which would be almost entirely unintelligible to me and might, indeed, provoke me to mockery or disgust; or I am a traveller of our own day, hastening in search of a vanished reality." [1961: 45])

[5] This is the process of 'sight sacralization' by which authenticity derives from the many semiotic markers set up to designate it (Culler 1990: 6). As Dean MacCannell put it, "the best indication of the final victory of modernity over other sociocultural arrangements is not the disappearance of the non-modern world, but its artificial preservation and reconstruction in modern society" (1976: 8).

modern 'sober bourgeois capitalism' (2005 [1930]: xxxvii). He pointed out that the means-end *Zweckrationalität* – the formal-practical rationality characteristic of the industrialized, capitalist West – both sprung from and led to the passing of pre-modern forms of 'substantive', ethical value-creation, to be found in religion. They were replaced, Weber famously diagnosed, by the logic of strict monetary accounting and bureaucratic management systems, within which a new personality type was born. By distinguishing different kinds of rationality as heuristic tools that individuals use to comprehend the incessant stream of social reality, Weber helps us better understand the modern tourist, who both requires the calculable, institutional edifices of global mobility in order to travel at all (booking platforms, flight schedules, and so on) – while also being acutely sensitive to substantive values within the tourist framework: enchantment, authentic experience, the liminal. Instead of marking the traveler or tourist as a strictly leisurely figure, we need to see each as *Berufsmensch*.

The latter point not only means that travel is hard work: its etymologic predecessor, 'travail', renders that clear enough. Rather, it is to argue against the segregation of 'travel' from the allegedly passive practices of 'tourism' (Boorstin 1961: 85; Fussell 1980: 39). Such distinctions are typically built on the genetic fallacy: comparing travel as a premodern or early modern phenomenon to tourism of the 20th century says very little about the ways in which both forms are meshing in contemporary society.[6] Many formerly 'adventurous' and out-of-the-way destinations have become popular by virtue of their popularization by early adopters and their commodification in guidebooks (Tony Wheeler's *Across Asia on the Cheap* being the canonical example), as well as the simple passing of time and concomitant growth of the tourism industry. Further, postmodern practices in between the archetypical polarities of travel, such as 'glamping' and 'flashpacking'[7], are continuously eroding the distinction between travelers and tourists. This difference primarily arises from the utterances of those who do the traveling. Rendering the traveler as *Berufsmench,* instead, should draw our attention to the instrumental organizing asset that travel is for the individuals lucky enough to reap its benefits, and the degree to which it contributes to knowledge of the world and one's place in it. It is a Weberian vocation in that it involves a feeling of devotion and virtuosity. This is a matter that should not be kept out of the equation, as it helps answering the same question that occupied Weber: why *does* the modern figure work so hard?

In tourism, we can trace Weber's thesis on the passing of magical thinking via the history of navigation – specifically in maps and atlases. The early seafaring charts that

[6] While the difference between travelers and tourists is hard to maintain, it is necessary to see that it is a distinction that arises through modernity. As Hulme and Youngs note, modernity is "a deeply contested term, but its original form – as Baudelaire's *modernité*, dating from an 1863 essay – ties it closely to notions of movement and individuality which, in the aristocratic figure of the flâneur, or stroller, stand out against the democratisation of travel marked by the appearance of Thomas Cook's first tour in 1841" (2002: 7).

[7] Glamping refers to 'glamorous camping' and flashpacking to upscaled and bigger-budget backpacking. Both of these phenomena are tied to the ideology of 'travel' (as opposed to tourism) but forego the discomforts of these budget forms of mobility.

were in circulation from the 10th to the 16th century feature a range of dragons, serpents, mermaids, and other otherworldly creatures. The earliest known world atlas in the Age of Discovery, the *Theatrum orbis terrarum* (1595), depicts Jonah on his ship as a chimeral sea creature attacks him.[8] These fantasies occupy the gaps in knowledge, and came to a halt with the close of the 16th century when information about the sea became more readily available: as world maps became more precise and complete, the monstrous and magical were less and less often depicted (Van Duzer 2013: 114). The progressive charting of the globe led to the creation of maps that held empirically validated representations of geographical position and form. Space, under this logic, becomes independent from any particular place or region, a standardized informational framework.[9]

It is precisely the optimized movement through space that is fully measured out – Giddens (1991) uses the paradoxical term 'empty space' – that the abovementioned authors lament. It seems that the enchantment of those who were drawing the first contours of the terrestrial map had a synecdochic quality: the achievements of these world explorers were not just projected upon themselves, but onto humanity ("a small step for man...").[10] In a charted world, however, the symbolic stock of the journey takes a nosedive. Glancing again at the images of our opening meme, we see they refer to the likes of, respectively, Columbus and Armstrong. These are not random figures. While traveling, one can still meet with romance, danger, or indirection – the same age-old things as Odysseus – and one might still come back a changed person. One might not come back at all. But implicit in the meme is the idea that the everyday traveler, within the calculable confines of tourism, primarily experiences her journey for herself, while ironically following the same spatial and epistemological grid as everyone else.[11] And that leads to the question how to turn such disconnected travel into an imaginatively meaningful practice.

Weber also points out that calculation predicates current ideas about transparency: calculation means that "wenn man nur wollte, es jederzeit erfahren könnte, daß es also prinzipiell keine geheimnisvollen unberechenbaren Mächte gebe, die da hineinspielen, daß man vielmehr alle Dinge – im Prinzip – durch Berechnen

[8] The 1570 version of the map can be found on the Internet Archive: https://archive.org/details/theatrumorbister00orte.

[9] This is of course not to say that journeys into unexplored territory are, historically, far behind us. For instance, Graham Greene's *Journey Without Maps* explored the Liberian interior only in 1935.

[10] Russell 'Rusty' Schweickart, the famous Apollo 9 astronaut, described his experience of looking down at earth from low Earth orbit – sometimes called the 'overview effect' – as follows: "You look down and see the surface of that globe that you've lived on all this time and you know all those people down there. They are like you, they are you, and somehow you represent them when you are up there – a sensing element, that point out on the end, and that's a humbling feeling. It's a feeling that says you have a responsibility. It's not for yourself" (in White 1998: 12).

[11] Since the popularization of travel writing in the 16th century, the power of travel writing has often been located in its "independence of perspective" (Hulme and Youngs 2002: 4), the strong individuality of the traveler capable of defeating speculation. Experience and observation, as per Enlightenment custom, came to replace tradition and established authority in the quest for knowledge.

beherrschen könne"[12] (1994 [1917]: 9). His point is invoked because it suggests that individual creativity and agency in modernity are at stake, a point we shall attend to further on. More immediately striking is Weber's notion of calculation, which can be placed in the context of travel and digital media. The ubiquity of systems of computation and calculation in every aspect of daily life – especially since the deployment of the World Wide Web and its inclusion in mobile devices – has had a decisive influence on every aspect of late modern travel. From booking and 'reading up', to writing down and reminiscing: all stages of one's trip can be inflected by or run through increasingly personalized and optimized procedural systems.

To illustrate, we can briefly return to the mapping example and see that, far from representing a stable, autonomous 'state of geographical knowledge' (De Certeau 1984: 121), maps have become increasingly transfixed and permutable. With Google & co. devising the world charts in the last decade, aggregate *big data* about locations, directions and distances can be filtered and personalized to ever-increasing mobile needs. The points of interest and highlighted routes can be made visible insofar as they are useful for the trip at hand. This, we might well say, enhances individual freedom and choice, and requires us to rethink the Weberian notion of petrification that was thought to accompany the technically ordered age of calculation. In any physical sense, the middle class has achieved the direct opposite: they live hypermobile lives, and have become a figurative cosmopolitan mobility or 'cosmobility' (Salazar 2010: 16). Instead of fixed rules and laws in bureaucratic systems limiting human freedom, the informational will to knowledge itself becomes more stable, fixed, or rigid. With mobile Internet access becoming increasingly common and global data plans becoming increasingly affordable, the individual traveler can seamlessly interface with aggregate knowledge frameworks to relate to the joyful, unexpected or worrisome eventualities of the trip. Those interfaced responses, then, become matters of information and problem solving. This, in itself, also implies that no one with an Internet connection and a smartphone needs to be *lost* – and it is precisely this calculability that is at stake here.[13]

Surely, we may understand the wistful accounts of the past as we just saw them as part of a nostalgic attitude, not necessarily founded on actual lived experience or collective historical memory, but on culturally permeated signs and myths, "the global institutionalization of the nostalgic attitude" (Robertson 1990: 158). An *armchair* or *imagined* nostalgia (Appadurai 1996: 76-78), to be precise, that is opportunistic and

[12] "[I]f one but wished one could learn it at any time. Hence, it means that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation" (Weber 1991 [1948]: 139).

[13] Ironically, where modern life becomes ever more predictable, modern subjects are often though to be trapped in an opposite course. Once postulated as centric, fixed, carthesian entities, 20st century thought transformed western man into a fragmented, discontinuous subject, theorized by (neo)-Marxism, psychoanalysis and the linguistic turn. All of them disrupt the notion of individual agency and stability, and to an extent, modern identities are modern insofar as they are de-centered, and in an unprecedented "crisis of identity" (Hall 1992: 275).

undemanding in its romanticist views of the past. More polemically yet, we might point to the 'imperialist nostalgia' with which modern travelers "mourn the passing of what they themselves have transformed" (Rosaldo 1993: 69-70) through the system of tourism in which they partake[14]. Yet if we swap this postcolonial lens for a semiotic one, we can point at the mediated nature of the nostalgia, and to see that the nostalgic imagination is itself embedded in representational mechanisms. That is, any imaginative act finds itself surrounded by a myriad of preformed frames, myths and imagery.[15] The late modern traveler's inability to experience something 'as new' may be most of all due to the hypermediated and information-rich environment within which the traveler enters into a semiotic negotiation between signs or markers and the sights they represent.[16] Walker Percy (1975: 47) deftly summarizes the phenomenon when he compares the experience of a tourist arriving at the Grand Canyon on a tour bus to that of the Spanish colonial adventurer.

> The thing is no longer the thing as it confronted the Spaniard; it is rather that which has already been formulated – by picture postcard, geography book, tourist folders, and the words Grand Canyon [...] The highest point, the term of the sightseer's satisfaction, is not the sovereign discovery of the thing before him; it is rather the measuring up of the thing to the criterion of the preformed complex.

As he confronts that elusive *thing,* the late modern tourist is always at the behest of his semiotic expectations (the 'symbolic complex'): a mixture of mediated imaginings, deriving from the likes of books, advertisements, social media, television programs, or games. This begets its own cultural phenomena, such as Paris syndrome (Viala et al. 2004): Japanese tourists suffering from a range of psychiatric symptoms due to the sudden, cathartic transplantation into the European city that they previously only knew through mediated (and radically distorted) mythologies.

We are at once reminded by Jonathan Culler that there *is* no such original state in which one might make a 'sovereign discovery' (1990: 6). In a Barthesian constructivist move, Culler designates such thinking as a 'myth of origins', and notes that authenticity is always a sign relation: there is no such thing as the explorer's authenticity, as "reality is nothing other than that which is intelligible" (ibid.: 2). But the point here, again, is about the seamlessness of informational access. Nostalgia for the past in hy-

[14] Bauman refers to the age to which our traveler nostalgia is pointed as 'hardware' or 'heavy' modernity: "the epoch of weighty and ever more cumbersome machines" (2000: 113-114). This was an era obsessed with territorial discovery and conquest, the spatial expansion of empires, in which uncharted, and thus 'empty' space was to be dominated.

[15] Focusing on the latter, Urry (2002: 129) has noted that "What is sought for in a holiday is a set of photographic images, which have already been seen in tour company brochures or on TV programmes. While a tourist is away, this then moves on to a tracking down and capturing of those images for oneself."

[16] MacCannell (1976) calls this process the sacralization of sight which happens in tourism – the process by which the proliferation of mechanically produced touristic signs (televised images, postcards, and so on) proves to create an authentic or original sight.

permediated culture betrays a comprehensive late modern disappointment, in which the prioritized images of places far and wide have to be constantly renegotiated when the place itself is visited. The tourist nostalgia is not just historical, but also epistemological. It asks: Why can't I *not* know anything? The corporeal moment, in other words, is anteceded by an unprecedented amount of representational assemblages and myths.

This, however, is not to say that being surrounded by myths, imaginaries or fantasies is necessarily detrimental to one's imaginative capacity. Goethe, the itinerant thinker, was suspicious of the novelty bias that runs through the late modern narratives. In his travel journal (which he called, more simply, an autobiography) he lets us know that it is precisely this preformed fantasy that is responsible for endowing our trip with value. Recognition needs not lead to disappointment. The romanticist, when witnessing the splendor of Rome for the first time, noted:

> wohin ich gehe, finde ich eine Bekanntschaft in einer neuen Welt; es ist alles, wie ich mir's dachte, und alles neu. Ebenso kann ich von meinen Beobachtungen, von meinen Ideen sagen. Ich habe keinen ganz neuen Gedanken gehabt, nichts ganz fremd gefunden, aber die alten sind so bestimmt, so lebendig, so zusammenhängend geworden, daß sie für neu gelten können.[17] (Goethe 2006: 108)

Unlike the late modern tourist, Goethe was not surrounded with images of Rome before he set out. But he shows how his observations (that is, his *Beobachtungen*: the rationally, purposefully, attentively perceived objects, phenomena or processes) constituted, in their familiarity, a sense of belonging. Goethe recognizes an acquaintance to or even state of friendship regarding the places he visited – his father had made a similar journey in his youth. By doing so, he shows how any preformed representational myth has the potential of causing grave disappointment precisely *because* it creates value and engages the sightseer in imaginative activity. The omnipresence of representations does not stifle the need to travel; the opposite is nearer the truth. Goethe leads us to recognize that, when it comes to tourist syndromes, the disruptive psychosis of the Paris Syndrome is closely related to overwhelming enchantment, to the sublime, the ecstatic moment.[18]

Finally, let us recall that the enchantment, in our meme, branches out in two temporal directions. It is telling in its technological self-confidence: humanity *will* explore the galaxy one day; we just likely will not be there to partake in it. Such nostalgia for the future traditionally belongs to that archetype of modern genres, science fiction.

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[17] "Wherever I go, I come upon familiar objects in an unfamiliar world; everything is just as I imagined it, yet everything is new. It is the same with my observations and ideas. I have not had a single idea which was entirely new or surprising, but my old ideas have become so much more firm, vital, coherent that they could be called new" (Goethe 1962: 129).

[18] Think of Stendhal syndrome (Magherini 1989), or the tourist fainting at the sight of Rome in the introduction of Sorrentino's *La Grande Bellezza*. The experience here is one of sublimity instead of disappointment.

But it is also part and parcel of a certain kind of everyday conversation, which Jaron Lanier (2003) designates as 'Silicon Valley metaphysics': the utopian visions of Western tech companies, leveraged in inspirational talks, startups and courses. Theirs is a position assuming that advanced technology is leading humanity to a joyous and egalitarian world in which "[w]e will not have to call forth what we wish from the world, for we will be so well modeled by statistics in the computing clouds that the dust will know what we want" (2003: 12). Surrounded by these visions of a precisely attuned technological future, the above meme demonstrates a type of late modern traveler who is captivated by two temporal imaginaries, and thus captured by two sentiments: one of apprehension, and one of confidence. What we see then is the ongoing dialectic movement, a newfound *Verzauberung* that is paradoxically based on technological calculus.[19]

Scripted journeys

There is some irony in the fact that the meme's author chose a format characterized by semiotic re-appropriation and derivation in order to indicate a lack of novelty in the act of travel. If we are to agree that language constitutes experience, then memes may be an appropriate synecdoche for the types of experience in an era of computer-mediated communication. The meme is a format or template: a series of stock pictures for each situation, with a stock font for its slogan. It is also a form of *bricolage*, a modular and editable phenomenon within what is called 'remix culture' (Lessig 2008). It is authored, but not legally owned, in a social context of anonymity and pseudonymity (boyd 2012). Its ordering and popularization are based on metrics, in this case ending up on *9GAG*'s 'Hot' section through the dynamics of liking. Finally, the meme appears in an epistemological context of big data and crowdsourced information – it is cached on a platform such as *9GAG*, in a stream of standing reserve that can be pulled on demand (Marwick and boyd 2010).

The meme stands as an emblematic case that helps us understand the characteristics of *scripted* interactions of travel, investigated in this study. We will focus on what travel 'stands for'; about its representation through symbolic discourse, under specific social conditions and through specific technological means or *procedures*. The reader will hopefully forgive the author for starting at the end, so to say, by laying out the conceptual scheme that is disclosed by and can help to explain the everyday appearances of travel writing, as we will encounter them in the papers to come. The types of signification on travel in computational spaces, while retaining dis-

[19] This study renounces any vulgar Weberian historicism in which disenchantment and means-end rationality are linear processes. Gellner, alternatively, speaks of the "facility of the world", in which the spontaneous and natural manipulation and internalization of machinery (interfaced by software, to update his point) points in a rather different direction than that of cold rationality (1975: 448). For an extended discussion, see Landy and Saler (2009).

cursive themes and motives from the classical travel novels and essays, are different in nature and form: they are encapsulated in, augmented by, and discovered through information retrieval, computational procedures, and systems of connectivity. Such procedures of signification provide keys for the construction and performance of identity by mostly first-world and middle-class authors and audiences.

The current study is about the lack of a better word for these computational forms of travel writing. As such, it should be noted, it is not about traditional authors or works. In their edited volume *New Directions in Travel Writing Studies,* Kuehn and Smethurst (2015) discuss many different theoretical and thematic approaches to the field, focusing on contemporary writers such as Robert Macfarlane and relatively unfamiliar ones such as Isabella Bird. Yet, there are no signposts referring to online environments and the everyday types of travel-centric interactions to be found there. Travel writing, as the authors note, was for a long time no certified topic of scholarly attention, like its 'more prestigious cousins' such as the novel, poetry or drama. This changed in the 1980s, when the counter-traditional wave in the humanities famously declared the end of grand narratives, and started engaging with minor and marginalized texts (Kuehn and Smethurst 2015: 1).

This thesis proceeds in this direction towards 'minor' texts. It assumes a transdisciplinary approach to online and computational environments and the interactions one finds therein. If we can concur that many people nowadays make sense of the world through the lens of tourism, its discourse should be sought after in everyday, colloquial discourse rather than in some separate field of activity (Edensor 2001; Thurlow and Jaworski 2015). It is in leisurely and quotidian forms of mobility, and the innocuous online discourses resulting from it, that the ideologies, identities and symbols of the current-day tourism industry reverberate. What is proposed, in sum, is a folkloristic study of travel writing. We will apply the vocabularies of symbolic interactionism, critical software studies and digital humanities to forms of travel writing, in order to uncover patterns of interactive and attendant epistemological mechanics. We will interface with different computational ecologies, such as personal blogs, peer-to-peer platforms, and video games. The central question throughout is how knowledge about travel is articulated and accessed by way of *scripts*. The remainder of this introduction will task itself with elaborating on the terms involved in this question.

Travel writing occurs in a context of *algorithmic culture*. Like the closely related word 'arithmetic'[20], the term algorithm descends, via Latin (*algorismus*) to early English (algorisme and, mistakenly therefrom, algorithm), from the name of a Persian mathematician, Muusa al-Khowarizm, who in about 835 A.D. wrote a vastly influential book on arithmetical procedures. In simplest terms, the algorithm can be thought of as a formal process or set of step-by-step, calculative procedures – a recipe of sorts – that is often expressed mathematically, transforming input data into a desired output. Or, more colloquially: it is a procedure for solving a problem. The term is interesting in its

[20] The word algorithm is historically closely tied to the Greek word for number, *arithmós* (*αριθμός*), but the etymological connection is not uncontested (cf. Striphas 2015).

integration in the aforementioned epistemology of information and the problem-solving disposition that the computer has since its conception been imbued with (cf. Weizenbaum and Wendt 2006). As decision-making processes, algorithms both describe the task at hand and the method by which it is to be accomplished (Goldschlager and Lister 1988; Gillespie 2012).[21] They include several automated functions, such as the prioritization of certain data over other data, the classification of data, the association between entities such as webpages, and the filtering of information according to specific criteria (Diakopoulos 2015: 400). This implies a particular logic of knowledge, "built on specific presumptions about what knowledge is and how one should identify its most relevant components" (Gillespie 2012: 168).

The current study stands in a growing body of both academic[22] and popular[23] literature that critically examines algorithms as social matters, and aims to transfer this knowledge to the field of tourism studies. The word 'algorithmic' takes precedence here over other available prefixes such as 'computational', 'networked' and 'online' culture – although to some degree, these terms overlap in their scope and focus on digital objects, languages, and structures.[24] We adopt the notion of algorithmic culture primarily to emphasize a specific epistemological system of meaning-making, and to emphasize the many ways in which the work of culture – the sorting, classifying and hierarchizing of people, places, objects and ideas, as Galloway (2006) calls it – has been delegated to data-intensive informational processes.[25] This epistemological position originates in mathematical theories of information developed between the 1920s and 1940s, such as by Ralph Hartley, who argued that "in any given communication the sender mentally selects a particular symbol […]. As the selections proceed more and more possible symbol sequences are eliminated, and we say that the information becomes more precise" (Hartley 1928: 536; cf. Gleick 2011). Information is thus conceived of in conjunction with the filter, which if exploited using the right mathematics,

[21] To Gillespie, algorithms form a paradigmatic regime of knowledge. Relying on them is "as momentous as having relied on credentialed experts, the scientific method, common sense, or the word of God" (2012: 168). We might add that the algorithm works through the logic of these other systems – it is a very particular representation of the scientific method; its allegedly independent and paint-by-numbers operation speaks to a commonsensical idea of neutrality and objectivity; its black-box linguistic material evokes ideas of mysticism.

[22] See for instance Helmreich 1998; Introna and Nissenbaum 2000; Soderman 2007; Beer 2009; Pasquinelli 2009; Granka 2010; Cheney-Lippold 2011; Fuller and Goffey 2012; Manovich 2013; Gillespie 2007, 2011, 2012; boyd, Levy and Marwick 2014; Kitchin 2014; Neyland 2015; Ziewitz 2015.

[23] See for instance Steiner 2013; Cormen 2013; Dormehl 2014; Pasquale 2015; Carr 2015; Domingos 2015.

[24] We could also opt for 'network culture' (cf. Miller 2011) – but this prism gives priority to the nature of the relations between individuals, not the nature of their content. 'Internet culture', another alternative, refers to an overly specific environment – the Internet is just a layer on top of the WWW. What all these concepts lack is a focus on the materiality of the media in question, and (relatedly) their technological specificity. 'Online culture', finally, would cover most – but not all – cases under scrutiny here. An online culture is certainly algorithmic, but an algorithmic culture does not necessarily unfold online.

[25] Manovich calls this the encoding of culture in digital form (2001).

mitigates the noise and thereby points the way toward order.[26] Internet-based epistemologies are altered by a series of continuous improvements to this precision – think of Google's increasingly fine-grained search algorithms, taking into account issues such as synonyms, context, and user intent (cf. Sadikov et al. 2010). This all implies that the dominant ideas of a society are the result of specific information processing tasks (Striphas 2015; cf. Manovich 2013).

Further, algorithmic culture, as we saw Weber predict already, lays claim to a high degree of transparency. South Korean cultural theorist Byung-Chul Han writes about the historical paradigm of the 'transparency society' in which language itself becomes functional, operational and without the noise that Bell's information scientists started to expel – language as a predictable, guidable, and controllable format. "Die transparente Sprache ist eine formale, ja eine rein maschinelle, operationale Sprache, der jede Ambivalenz fehlt"[27] (2015: 7), writes Han, and what he implies is of course that this transparency, in a cultural context, always presupposes a *filter*. Information can, paradoxically, only appear to us as transparent when it leaves any disruptive or incongruent information out of the equation. What, and how, does this ideology of information conceal?

In his use of the algorithm to understand natural history, Daniel Dennett emphasizes their simplicity, reliability and foolproof nature (1995: 51) – every 'dutiful idiot', in Dennett's terms, is able to put them into action. And this rings true. In the daily life of online citizens, algorithms are ubiquitous yet invisible: they are used in most online processes of communication and the retrieval of information about the world. This surreptitious pervasiveness is often explained by the fact that most algorithms function as black boxes, which are devised, maintained and exploited by what Jaron Lanier calls Siren Servers – the handful of Silicon Valley tech giants that is leading users to share their data on a network, which "is analyzed using the most powerful available computers, run by the very best available technical people. The results of the analysis are kept secret, but are used to manipulate the rest of the world to advantage" (2003: 55). While these proprietary algorithms – think of Google's search engine or Facebook's personalized newsfeed – determine what is filtered (and thus, what is valuable and noteworthy), these systems are often opaque to the individual programmer, let alone to the regular users tapping into them on a daily basis.

The sheer size and complexity of algorithmic implementation, often involving several unpredictably interacting systems, means that, even when one would take a look at the constitutive code, its working in reality is not fully deducible. It also means that minor alterations can have sizeable ramifications. When, in 2012, YouTube

[26] This is evident in the ethical job that Silicon Valley entrepreneurs see themselves tasked with: the overwhelming credo is that innovation, not money, is the ultimate guideline. Thus, poverty and inequality become an issue of engineering, where the solution is the development of a more effective informational architecture and infrastructure.

[27] "Transparent language is a formal, indeed, a purely machinic, operational language that harbors no ambivalence" (Han 2015: 7).

tweaked its search-ranking algorithm from a view-based to a retention-based system (meaning the total number of seconds someone spends watching a video was given greater importance vis-à-vis the number of 'clicks'),[28] there were channels whose viewership numbers dropped drastically overnight. Influential as they may be, tweaks such as these often are not well documented and thus not accessible to the public that experiences their effects. There is an inverse relationship between the (collectively distributed and accessible) knowledge itself, and epistemological knowledge, that is, knowledge about the means by which exactly we acquire knowledge. Many critical theorists have picked up this thread to argue and show that algorithms can directly impact lives (Beer 2009: 994), function as a conduit of capitalist power (Lash 2007: 1), and act as a form of governmental regulation (O'Reilly 2013). The algorithm then starts serving as a sociotechnical synecdoche about information technologies, the dynamic of people and code, which explains its increased usage as an adjective in social studies (see for instance Cheney-Lippold 2011; Uricchio 2011; Bucher 2012; O'Reilly 2013). There is a thespian quality to the use of the word: Ziewitz (2015) recently wrote of the 'algorithmic drama', in which the algorithm is turned into a myth in and of itself.

Yet, as we noted already, algorithms are no self-enclosed and inscrutable computational systems to begin with. They do not function in a societal vacuum; they take part in human performance and interaction. As such, it might be more accurate to replace the word 'automated' that was employed above with 'heteromated' (Ekbia and Nardi 2014). That is to say, algorithmic systems necessarily involve end users as facilitators of their tasks, and are not only oriented to the actions of machines. This however has implications that are far more complex than the opaque oppression that the algorithmic drama suggests: it means that social relations are altered as humans are being fashioned as computational components. Ekbia and Nardi note that enterprises benefit from the labor of others; algorithms often prescribe protocols for human work and thereby make human work the prolonged arm of computation. This asymmetrical labor relation is often hidden from view by the strong affective rewards of engagement that they incorporate (sometimes dubbed *gamification*). The user in many ways is a player – in the double sense that she plays, and is being played. The social and procedural media under discussion here can all be considered as heteromated algorithmic systems, in the sense that they are all composed of, distributed by and/or operating through algorithms, can be *interfaced* with by their users, bear social results, and may be understood as socio-technical performances (Introna 2013) and, indeed, as forms of play.

However, the point is not to recede into a machine-state functionalism that can be found in the algorithmic scrutiny of identity itself. Hilary Putnam's analogy between the mind and the Turing machine was abandoned for good reason: it cannot account for the productivity of thought and human agency. The argument here, rather, suggests knowledge regimes that leverage and influence, but not command, human

[28] See http://youtubecreator.blogspot.nl/2012/10/youtube-search-now-optimized-for-time.html and http://www.cnet.com/ news/youtube-now-ranking-videos-by-time-watched-not-clicks/.

action. We are not just dealing with the idiosyncrasies of specific media, but with an algorithmic sodality functioning both in- and outside of them; the algorithmic aspect of western culture. Our culture concept is, in other words, not a diffuse but a *bracketed* entity: we postulate the parameters of *one* dimension of culture. These parameters are semiotic ones – webs of signification that, in the end, are spun by man alone (Geertz 1973: 5).

From writing to scripts

This understanding of algorithmic culture prepares us to see why certain terms will not be used often in this study – most significantly, the rubric of 'travel writing'. As a famously hybrid and miscellaneous literary genre, travel writing includes all manner of styles, genres and formal qualities. It can be said to involve novelistic characters and plot lines, poetic descriptions, historical information, essayistic tones of voice, and autobiographical elements (Swick 2010; cf. Theroux 2014). These are means for the writer "to show the effects of his or her own presence in a foreign country and to expose the arbitrariness of truth and the absence of norms" (Blanton 2002). Many definitions stress the open-endedness and instability that belong to travel – and thus to the stories written about it. British travel writer Jonathan Raban paints this picture with rather broad and normative strokes:

> Travel in its purest form requires no certain destination, no fixed itinerary, no advance reservation and no return ticket, for you are trying to launch yourself onto the haphazard drift of things, and put yourself in the way of whatever changes the journey may throw up. (Raban: 2011)

Similarly, Frances Mayes emphasizes how "travel is for learning, for fun, for escape, for personal quests, for challenge, for exploration, for opening the imagination to other lives and languages" (2002: xxiii) And Hulme and Youngs (2002: 5) report in the *Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* that "[t]ravellers will usually follow their instincts and opportunities, rather than directions from home." These authors underline the oft-heard explorative and imaginary dimensions of travel writing, and the authorial position associated with it. The aim here is wholly different: to relocate our attention to the specific mechanics of travel discourses, which are influenced by the technological environment in which they arise.

Further, our interest in the heteromated dynamics of algorithmic environments allows us to appreciate discursive patterns throughout traditionally different genres, such as informal travel blogs and commercial tourist leaflets. This is relevant as such generic distinctions have been often employed in travel writing studies. As Francesconi (2014: 18) observes in her book *Reading Tourism Texts*: "while 'tourism' texts might be those illocutionary promotional items produced by the tourism industry in order to sell

packages, 'travel' texts would refer to books, reports and diaries that narrate a holiday experience with an aesthetic purpose." Yet, as we bring into focus the scripted nature of different types of travel-related communication, the intersections of these genres and modalities become evident. For instance, the professional travel blog, while containing an overtly personal narrative, may often incorporate bespoke content and affiliate links. It is the combination of these two things that fosters a concerted construction of a type of blogger persona. The touristic (as in, economic) modality of textual composition conjoins with the diary-like genre, creating an amalgam.

The same complexity subverts the distinction that Dann (1996, 2007, 2012) has drawn up regarding different stages of one's trip – that is, a difference between literature belonging to what he calls 'pre-trip' (e.g. brochures detailing a destination to convince potential customers), 'on-trip' (maps and guidebooks that can be consulted during the journey) and 'post-trip' (postcards and other textual souvenirs that are taken or sent home afterwards). Many of the scripts under scrutiny here provide guidance across the borders of these phases: to return to the travel blogging example, it serves at once as a seductive series of stories and pictures to lure a readership into travel, and information about certain destinations than can be accessed while traveling. The omnipresence of mobile devices with Internet access – which has globally risen to 38.1% of the global population in 2013, up from 23.2% in 2008 (Internet Society 2015) – is especially relevant in this discussion. To classify the production or reception of tourist discourses within specific temporal zones is to ignore what makes them especially interesting and complex: they exceed those limits and precisely thereby exert influence.

As we noted above, the type of texts we find online are algorithmically informed. We might employ Espen Aarseth's concept of 'ergodic literature' to further explore this. Aarseth's term refers to mechanically organized texts (hypertexts, games, and so on), and is characterized by the "nontrivial effort [that] is required to allow the reader to traverse the text" (1997: 1). In Aarseth's view, ergodic literature (deriving from the Greek words *ergon* and *hodos*, meaning 'work' and 'path') allows for a great degree of choice by the reader – who is actually not a reader anymore, but a player. When reading a cybertext,

> you are constantly reminded of inaccessible strategies and paths not taken, voices not heard. Each decision will make some parts of the text more, and others less, accessible, and you may never know the exact results of your choices; that is, exactly what you missed. (Aarseth 1997: 3)

Indeed, internet users do not know what they do not know – but it is harder to accept Aarseth's point that one is constantly reminded thereof. The opposite seems nearer the truth: algorithmic platforms and their surface interfaces often hide their proprietary nature and functional mechanisms from their users. Their very nature is to make these users neglect or forget what is *not* there. To speak of work-paths in

algorithmic culture means not to speak of epistemological choice but of the preordained pathways, conduits or routes of knowledge. Their creation also entails a form of human rationality: Weber in this context speaks of *Gleise* ('tracks'), which are laid down by a rationally consistent worldview to which individuals can orient their actions. The function of such tracks is to 'master reality', that is, systematically confront the stream of irrational forces and events in social life. Their goal is the driving out of the aleatory, the banishing of particularized perceptions by ordering them into comprehensible and meaningful regularities. Contrary to what Aarseth claims, in algorithmic environments often little effort – not more – is required to traverse the text.

In short, the cultural material of travel discourses in algorithmic culture requires a different figure than that of 'travel writing' alone. The one that is offered here is that of the *script*, which is understood as a series of interfaced performances and interactions through computational frameworks, from which social relations arise. It is an ideal-type or *concept-metaphor* – Henrietta Moore defines the latter as

> domain terms that orient us towards areas of shared exchange, which is sometimes academically based… Their exact meanings can never be specified in advance – although they can be defined in practice and in context – and there is a part of them that remains outside or exceeds representation. (Moore 2004: 73)

Like algorithms, scripts are computational series of commands – but besides relating to a computational pathway, the word has histrionic connotations, referring to a written template or format. The script is an example of what Mieke Bal, in the wake of Edward Said (1982) has called a 'traveling concept' (2002). This is the kind of concept that needs not be confined to its methodological birthplace, allowing one to move across disciplinary boundaries (in this case: tourism studies, cultural studies, and digital humanities). Not only does it set up parameters for understanding the protocollary materiality of communication, it also brings into focus the creative forms of enactment and performance that it attempts to regulate, as well as highlighting travel communication as forms of guidance – of the contemporary configuration of the 'travel guide', which started its itinerary in the second century AD with Pausanias' 10-volume *Guide to Greece* (Francesconi 2014: 20-21).

Permission settings

Surely, scripts can be found in all kinds of human-computer interaction, though we will task ourselves here with 'travel scripts'. Here is an illustrative series of such scripted interactions, some of which may be familiar to the reader:

- Checking up on a family member's travel blog on *Travelpod*;
- Comparing hotel ratings on *Booking.com* to determine which one to visit;
- Entering a destination on the *Google Maps* app as to see the route, length and estimated duration of the trip ahead;
- Acquiring badges and achievements on *Tripadvisor* after entering a number of restaurant reviews;
- Using controller input to virtually climb the Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence in the videogame *Assassin's Creed*.

These activities may be appreciated as events, in the Foucauldian sense of allowing us to inquire into "the connections, encounters, supports, blockages, plays of forces, strategies, and so on, that at a given moment establish what subsequently counts as being self-evident, universal, and necessary" (2000: 227). The list elucidates the great extent to which algorithmic communication systems are integrated in the infrastructure of tourism, and the complex systems of semiotic production and reception that individuals as 'users' are engaged in.

Further, there is large degree of convergence across these media (Jenkins 2006), in which processes of travel writing, social media services, global mapping systems, aggregate data and videogame procedures are intersecting. We are dealing with computational systems and communicational flows within and between which prosumers operate. All of the above contexts involve the production and reception of language and writing, but going down the list, the organic 'natural language' of man is encapsulated by formal computer language. It is also a matter of increasingly stringent types of interfaces, prompting certain modes of interaction. We could also read the list downwards up, and recognize that the scripts found in computer code – as parameters of control, determining what can and cannot be done – are also present in the more traditional types of communication we find online (such as on a travel blog). The above examples involve scripts in their linguistic materiality: they are forms of information retrieval, built upon a set of instructions circumscribing and regulating the to-be-performed tasks of a heteromated system.

Some more general examples can be given to clarify what is included in the script. A website that guides the user through several stages of setting up her profile involves a script; a videogame that guides the player in one direction alone involves a script; an API[29] through which a travel community website automatically posts one's latest visited country to one's Facebook profile involves a script. As was noted before, this means that scripts do not just operate within the scope of programming languages, and a second layer within which scripts operate should be distinguished: that of semiotic behavior with which individuals make sense of the world. The analytical focus

[29] Application Programming Interface; a set of routines, protocols, and tools that specify how different types of components should interact; for instance, Amazon's Product Advertising API gives developers access to Amazon's product selection and discovery functionality to advertise Amazon products to monetize a website.

of this thesis thus rests on the intersection between algorithmic environments and the discourses within these frames of computational affordances. A strict separation of scripts as programmatological system (Cayley 2002) and scripts as a type of discursive action – a base-superstructure model – would be unproductive: both are interrelated in a continuous feedback loop. In other words, scripts do not have agency in and of themselves: they are the result of performative interactions between actors, which are in a continuous and partly indeterminable flux that themselves generate stability.[30]

The question, then, becomes what one's active relationship to the script is – what is the operative verb here? One does not just *read* scripts, since they are not always intelligible as such. We might follow Lawrence Lessig (2008) in taking a cue from file system permission settings, which control the ability of users to view or make changes to the file system content. Being able to read a file is one thing; often times, another option is to *execute* it. Some small examples may help start clarifying this perspective. In the case of search engines and autocomplete forms, knowledge is structured through a computational, quantitative analysis of how most users complete similar search queries. Users, in turn, levee their epistemic queries through these systemic flows. Similar processes occur in video games, embodied by the invisible hand of the 'scripted sequence', in which certain events are triggered to occur as the player meets certain requirements or arrives at certain in-game locations. That player becomes intuitively familiar with these moments in which control is taken away and things happen to happen as they do. And for an example in the field of tourism we can turn to a map once more – one that is integrated on the *TripAdvisor* platform. It is a map that is color-filled insofar as the user has shared information or left reviews in the countries she has visited. It is a scripted response of visual feedback that both signifies approval, and constructs a new, playful and scripted goal of completion (namely, that of filling in the world map), thereby legitimating and creating a constituency for physical travel. Yet, this response itself is not based on actual bodily travel, but on shared information of that travel: it reacts to and erects a *persona*, which means at once more and less than 'identity' insofar as the identity is not as essentialist entity, but a slice of it, a constructed, represented, and *filtered* appearance.

The map exists in the tightly structured environment of *TripAdvisor* as a whole. One fills in a highly specific contribution form with text and a 5-star ranking system, which is immediately embedded in the aggregate metrics. Further, the authorship on the platform is properly gamified, with user achievements, points, badges and levels being distributed based on the user's degree of involvement. In all of these examples, a feedback loop appears, encompassing the fixed form of communication on the user's end and the types of computational responses it results in. This also shows that the user's execution of the script not only implies a lack of agency or power – rather, it is

[30] Introna (2016) refers to Deleuzian 'ontology of becoming', in order to indicate that we cannot view algorithms as the stable entities from which the analysis departs: the stability itself is an ongoing accomplishment of many different actors that are in flux and change. A similar point can be made about the concept of the script.

to say that the script is a Foucauldian conduit of power, in that it is capable of imposing a temporally regulated field of knowledge and patterns of action and constraint, from which the user draws (often consciously) in order to define, express and solve certain problems, thus reaping its organizational benefits to decide what information to filter. Or, to be more precise: the proliferation of the social script is related to the trust in the programmatological script.[31]

Scripts as loci of expressive control are tied up in a paradoxical relationship with the practicalities of global travel: to the Western middle class, traveling is more accessible, immediate and prone to impulsiveness than ever. As information streams are increasingly distributed and integrated in applications in 'real time', users of modern technology are arguably under the continuous sway of opportunity (a phenomenon that Bauman (1997) has aptly called the 'continuous present'). What restaurant to go to, what hostel to crash in, and which road to take there, can all be determined playfully, and on the fly. The power of the real-time may indeed cultivate spontaneity, but, ironically, it derives from and requires the scripted imposition of calculation and procedures as discussed above. Late modern travel, thus, is comprised of both rigid proceduralization *and* playful behavior. This means to emphasize that scripts at once delimit the player's action while also inviting a certain amount of creativity on her end within their strictly predefined set of rules, fostering a degree of tension, chanciness and uncertainty when playing (Huizinga 1949: 26). This also emphasizes that many of these scripts lead to socially competitive environments, which we will explore further on.

As was noted earlier, scripts and their formal-procedural execution are not just limiting in terms of their in- and exclusion of what can be said, represented, or done. In fact, in the field of programming, scripts usually refer to programs that provide high-level directions to *other* actors or programs, which then do most of the actual computation.[32] They are top-level directives, but their functioning depends on all the supportive structures in place. This is where the histrionic dimension of the concept also proves to be relevant: responding to and operating through scripts cannot be pulled apart from the inherently dramatic appeal of their enactment. Digital media foster dramaturgical awareness, as Markham (2013: 3) comments, because of the necessity to deliberately enact the self by writing it down – the self would simply not exist within such a mediated environment otherwise. This is an activity that involves

[31] This normative function of the algorithm can be noticed in the curious inversion of a popular sci-fi trope: people posing as algorithms, instead of the other way around. Several aggregate services have been emerging through which enterprises may offload menial tasks to other people, who sometimes literally impersonate the algorithm. See for instance https://medium.com/@arikaleph/facebook-m-the-anti-turing-test-74c5af19987c. This is also the premise of Amazon's online marketplace for employers, Mechanical Turk, which offers a databank of global workers who can execute microtasks such as data transcription. Human employees are rendered into reliable and cost-effective resources of heteromated computational processing (Irani and Silberman 2013).

[32] Scripts are traditionally written in 'shell languages', which allow users to run other programs (e.g. Windows Command Prompt or Bash).

reflexivity about what is required to perform effectively, and about what other users are seeing (cf. Berger 1963; Waskul 2005).

The script is, therefore, also a matter of performance. Erving Goffman,[33] the symbolic interactionist, has written about dramatic scriptings in commercial productions on television and radio, magazines, and other media. These media, he argues, organize specific 'strips' taken from the stream of ongoing social activity, which are then "made available for vicarious participation to an audience or readership." Goffman goes on to note how mediated scriptings "provide a mock-up of everyday life, a put-together script of unscripted social doings" (Goffman 1986: 53). That is to say, everyday human behavior as such is not scripted – its dramatic organization and representation is. What we called 'executing' a script, in Goffman's terminology would be 'animating' an utterance instead of authoring or originating it (1986: 520). Bringing in Goffman allows us to think about the types of ritualization and exaggeration that belong to the enactment of scripts. It also, importantly, helps us to prevent falling into the anti-humanistic trap. We should not represent individuals in algorithmic culture as passive nodes within the patterned and structured mechanics of scripted communicational systems. We instead ought to see them as interactional actors, embedded in but never fully conditioned by the systems that organize experience. This study is one into represented, stabilized roles in which we know each other and ourselves – not the embodied, fluid stream of experiences that precedes this organization and is a condition of its functioning.[34] When we are speaking about 'identity', we are speaking about *persona* (the word has appeared a few times already). That is, a strategically deployed, publically available and negotiated, and comparable[35] representation of self.

Put differently, while maintaining the permission settings metaphor: one can *write* with scripts, one can define oneself through them. This is the point that Clay Shirky continually makes: people becoming bored of preformatted television

[33] The reader will note that, as the current object of inquiry pertains to the types of communications between travelers and those at home (or merely the latter), it mostly bypasses MacCannell's adaptation of Goffman concerning the front and back region or stage (1976) as this theory involves the experience of tourists vis-à-vis those they encounter abroad. Moreover, as Goffman's work was written before the advent of algorithmic culture, and most of it refers to face-to-face interaction, we need to extrapolate upon it within this new context of asymmetrical, networked communication (cf. Ytreberg 2002; Hogan 2010; Murthy 2012).

[34] Goffman calls the determination of the reality of the situation a "working consensus", underlining that what we consider 'real' does not pertain to what actually exists, but "whether it will be credited or discredited" on the spot (1959: 253).

[35] In the words of Byung-Chul Han (2012: 6), who echoes a familiar Marxist theme of the introduction of monetary dynamics in social settings: "Transparent werden die Dinge, wenn sie ihre Singularität ablegen und sich ganz in Preis ausdrücken. Das Geld, das alles mit allem vergleichbar macht, schafft jede Inkommensurabilität, jede Singularität der Dinge ab. Die Transparenzgesellschaft ist eine Hölle des Gleichen." ("Things prove transparent when they abandon their singularity and find expression through their price alone. Money, which makes it possible to equate anything with anything else, abolishes all incommensur-ability, any and all singularity. The society of transparency is an *inferno of the same*" [Han 2015: 2]).

programming, 'cutting the cable', and starting to actively create their own media online. The Internet, as is often heard, allows for a 'lean forward' mode of active prosumption. Our point here is that these prosumers do not conjure up media objects wholly by themselves, but do so within pre-programmed ecologies. This means that writing, executing and reading scripts are to a large degree convergent practices: if one writes a blog entry on an online platform, one is simultaneously engaging in all three activities. Even the most clear-cut example of 'writing' – the programmers designing the scripts of the digital environments that their users will employ – involves the use of information about the practices and behavior of these or similar users (i.e., forms of reading). In online spaces, it is decidedly difficult to draw up sharp distinctions between readers and writers.

Classifying value

Earlier, we noted that the algorithm is a procedure for solving problems. We might well ask: *whose* problems? We are then led to the notion of class, which ties into the discussion of value and rationalization that this introduction began with. The habitus we are inquiring into belongs primarily to the mobile peoples of the early 21st century, located in Western Europe, North America, and East China (Badone and Roseman 2004). A small field observation by the author at a university gym might be recalled here. It involves a young man, tangled up in fitness machinery, and across from him a girl working up a treadmill sweat. "So this summer we were in Indonesia," she begins. He responds, with conditioned enthusiasm and a knowing look in his eyes: "Oh yes, extremely gorgeous." "So you've been there as well?" "Yeah, very pretty. It is really... no, come to think of it, Malaysia is even prettier. We chartered an airplane to this small island..."

The protagonists of this vignette fall under the broad label that Nielson used to signify persons aged 18-34 in 2012: 'Generation C', for 'Connected'. They are studying or already have a college degree under their belts, are media-savvy and share an interest in the global concerns and job opportunities that the information age affords. In short, they are part of an upper middle class populace that Weber might have called the bourgeois. Today, a neologism like the *entreflâneur*[36] seems more appropriate: the class for which wandering, sightseeing and self-production are congruent activities, designated by a vocabulary of risk and initiative. Of course, in networked environments where many heterogeneous voices coalesce, not all voices will be that of this ideal type. Despite this caveat, we can recognize a myriad of preoccupations, sentiments and ideas endemic to the middle class in our case studies. As a starting point, we can take a leaf out of Franco Moretti's instructive book *The Bourgeois* (2013), a Weberian investigation into bourgeois mentality, which asks: "bourgeois 'opinions and ideals' – what *are* they?" (2013: 1, emphasis original). Interestingly, the book is replete with

[36] I owe this point to a discussion with Liam Magee at Western Sydney University.

examples of travel novels and novellas to render its point and locate the central keywords that Moretti, in lieu of Raymond Williams (1983), ascertains – one of the central works it investigates is Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe,* in which the titular hero establishes a strict regime of work on the island he is trapped on. Moretti's keywords provide us with a number of paradoxes of bourgeois travel that will recur throughout the thesis.

The world of the bourgeois, says Moretti, is firstly 'useful' (2013: 35), establishing an instrumental, means-end orientation. Robinson Crusoe places himself in the center of the world (things are "useful *to me*", as Moretti cites him), and his surroundings are commensurate to his personal utility. This teleological worldview, in the current context, can be related to the quest for and demands of authenticity that many travel scripts are geared toward. Within the field of tourism studies, this search for the authentic has received copious attention – initially by Dean MacCannell, who argued that it is this search that pushes people through the front door, over the porch and towards foreign countries. In a Goffmanian vein, MacCannell focused on the touristic 'back region' (MacCannell 1973, 1976) – referring to idealized, 'authentic' spaces and practices such as being 'in the know' about which places are hot and not, being friends with locals, and so on. In order to reach these spaces, tourists have to offset themselves from other tourists – as Jacobsen puts it, "the possibilities of experiencing something authentic and typical are inversely proportional to the number of tourists present in an area" (2000: 287). Travel, being part of consumer culture and a proxy for social status (Munt 1994; Mowforth and Munt 2008; Kane 2012), involves significant and 'serious' work (to borrow another of Moretti's keywords). Exploring the world on one's economic credits, one may procure the social capital that comes with such endeavors – more so, yet, if one can reach past the standardized touristic fronts such as the monocultural shopping streets in the city center. Today, a number of services such as *Spotted by Locals* or *Airbnb* allow the user to reach a certain kind of backstage. And as one blogger, who we will encounter further on, puts it:

> My *New York Times* best-selling paperback guide to world travel will teach how to master the art of travel so that, no matter how long you want to travel for, you'll save money, get off the beaten path, and have a more local, richer travel experience.[37]

Yet, while the 'object authenticity' (Reisinger and Steiner 2006; Lau 2010) of the visited place may be feigned, we ought also to note that authenticity attaches itself to identity as well. The ideal of the cosmobility is not just to experience the authentic, but also to *become* authentic. Authenticity is part of the presentational, branded truck and barter of the middle class – an identity constituent with a certain semiotic and *functional* value. The ideology of 'authentic identity' is relevant to what Dann (1996: 2) calls the language of tourism: the specific discourse found in promotional tourism texts, which

[37] See http://www.nomadicmatt.com/books

"attempts to persuade, lure, woo and seduce millions of human beings, and, in doing so, convert them from potential into actual clients." Such a language, after all, deals in more than just tours: it sells identities that are fit for experiencing these journeys properly. In what follows, we will trace identity figures in the language of contemporary tourism that stake a claim in authenticity.

Successfully packaging the self requires certain scripted procedures. This is also why we will see certain recognizable literary figures reappear as dichotomous alternatives to the tourist, such as the pilgrim, the insider, and others. These types function as fixed positions to which their users can orient themselves – a series of traits that can be honed and refined – while offering specific narrative models for their users. Correspondingly, there is a high degree of *how-to-ness* running throughout the scripts presented here; they often take the form of recommendations, instructions or prescriptions about how to travel, as well as how to write about it.[38] Opinion making, rhetorical strategy, and their corollary, 'influence' – not coincidentally another of Moretti's keywords – are central power functions in the bourgeois realm, which will be explored on several occasions. But while companies in technology or tourism alike may incessantly assert that they know what it is that the user in algorithmic culture would want, these wants are continuously being constructed and drawn out. In many cases, people go online to encounter positions, ideas or goals that they *find themselves* to be desiring, and acquire information that *turns out* to be relevant to them.[39]

Moretti's next bourgeois term, 'efficiency', entails a certain economical deftness in one's productivity, and connotes a lack of concern for the moral legitimacy behind these actions. The term will return on many occasions in these pages as well – in fact, it has already surfaced in the context of algorithmic environments, in which optimal connections between people are arranged, and information becomes increasingly precise. Travel may be practiced in one's 'free time' – such time is not analogous to time spent freely, as Sebastian de Grazia submitted (1994). That is: scripts fit in an algorithmic culture in which 'free time' is itself a temporarily calculated and demarcated sphere of activity. This efficiency is followed by another keyword that might seem paradoxical at first, namely 'adventure' (2013: 25), but Moretti shows how this word is deeply related to the practice of entrepreneurship. Robinson Crusoe, instead of a figure inspiring caution, is the modern 'crafty navigator' who engages in a high-risk investment, and performs this task with maximum efficiency. This intersection of the notion of adventure and the Weberian entrepreneurial spirit will become especially evident in the professional travel blogs in section two of this thesis.

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[38] We can recognize this cultural disposition, for instance, on the first page of cross-referenced Google results when 'travel writing' is entered: it predominantly features tips for becoming a travel writer. The popularity of this how-to discourse when it comes to travel writing is also reflected in a genre in printed travel literature, with titles such as *Unforgettable Places To See Before You Die* (Davey 2004).

[39] Culler (1990: 10) falls into this trap when he comments that tourism has become a semiotic consensus on a societal scale. "Our primary way of making sense of the world," he offers, "is as a network of touristic destinations and possibilities which we ought in principle to visit." The point here is that this thought is exactly what the agents using the language of tourism expect their customer base to believe.

The bourgeois adventure is further complicated by Moretti's keyword of 'comfort': the need for domestic orderliness, the normality of home. Robinson Crusoe, despite fashioning himself in terms of a "meer wandering inclination" (in Moretti 2013: 28), cannot be content until he furnishes a chair and a table for himself. Such homeliness may seem contradictive to the ideal of wayward exploration – until we realize that it is precisely this type of paradox that characterizes contemporary dynamics of tourism. The oscillation returns on a myriad of accommodation services and platforms – especially, not scantily, the more 'adventurous' ones. On the *Airbnb* front page, for instance, travelers are greeted in spite of their purported Wanderlust with the text 'Welcome home'. And the peer-to-peer platforms we will attend to in section three are engaged in constructing 'insiders', which refers to guides who teach their customers the appropriate forms of local knowledge and behavior – but which is also an identity ideal type for these visiting customers to appropriate (to 'become a local'; to be at home wherever they would want).

Finally, to repeat a point with which we took off: the behaviors and interactions mentioned above are not just variations on *Zweckrationalität*. They are moral pursuits that go beyond the adage of maximum utility, and we cannot reduce the call to authenticity or homeliness to a utilitarian requisition. Another of Moretti's bourgeois keywords, 'earnest', emphasizes this point. It is a Victorian word that refers not so much to the objective results of one's actions (like seriousness does) but to the manner and spirit in which one performs. Moretti explains this Victorian stress on 'being earnest' as a definite qualifier of identity – despite the modern claim to facts, professionalism and punctuality – endures in its tonality, as an ethical and sentimental demand in the bourgeois realm. Interestingly, the same is sometimes said for the academic language depicting forms and representations of travel. Franklin and Craig (2001: 14), for instance, offer that the tone in academic writing can be 'desperately earnest', while its object of inquiry is all about fun, enjoyment and playfulness. Yet, as we did in the meme, we will find in the case studies to follow ample signs of earnestness amidst the ludic vagrancies of tourism. This is no surprise, of course, as this earnestness is itself a form of playfulness. Travel, as always, can be a vector for all manner of objectives: solemn personal pursuits, conspicuous consumption, or joyful, social play. We will take the tourist serious, perhaps a bit too serious. But this is preferable over the potential underestimation that is its alternative.

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CHAPTER 2

Methods

2.1 Text research on online platforms: Heuristics and pitfalls

Tom van Nuenen (forthcoming). Text research on online platforms: Heuristics and pitfalls. In C. Costa and J. Condie (eds.), *Doing Research in and on the Digital: Research Methods Across Fields of Inquiry*. London: Routledge.

Introduction

This chapter will discuss basic heuristic steps for explorative and unsupervised computational text research in current online environments – a form of 'corpus-assisted discourse studies' (Partington 2006). It examines several popular methods for humanities researchers to gather, prepare, sort and analyze online data, and offers suggestions to the vacillation between so-called 'distant' and 'close' reading strategies – not for the purpose of prediction or classification, but for a straightforward textual interpretation. We will engage with the questions of scope, prioritization, transformation and representation that such an interpretative back-and-forth entails. The chapter will open with a discussion on the context and broader epistemological questions of online text analysis before investigating a case study, taken from the relatively new digital contexts for travel writing. In what follows, we will outline several procedures for scraping, pre-processing and analyzing an online data repository through Python – although no actual code will be depicted and no prior exposition to Python is needed. We will see a number of caveats and issues arise in the process, which are deemed typical of online text mining, and discuss the merits and deficiencies of such techniques.

Method: Macro-analysis and text mining

Digital methods in the humanities have produced a field that has come to be labelled in the past few years as digital humanities (DH). The field has been around for decades before its recent popularity: it was previously known as humanities computing, and dates back to least to Father Roberto Busa's work on concordances in the 1940s. The computational gathering and analysis of large corpora of texts (sometimes called 'text mining') has been undertaken by corpus linguists ever since

(cf. Flowerdew 1997; Baker 2004: 1). Text mining de-emphasizes individual occurrences of features or words in favor of a focus on the larger system or corpus and its aggregate patterns and trends. As a method, it has become increasingly useful due to the rapid growth in production of personal information and public sharing within Web 2.0 contexts, as well as the advent of big data infrastructures and the rise of databases and data processors that John Durham Peters (2013) calls 'logistical media' – that is, media whose content is not so much narratival or representational as it is organizational (such as the database). Peters offers that this is also a cultural phenomenon, characterized by "the heightened popular attention to media technologies that function in a different register than the content-driven mass media (Peters 2013: 40).

Due to these societal changes, it was not until recently that mainstream humanities starting picking up on digital methods. However, Andrejevic et al. (2015) have noted that the epistemological trend brought about by big data analytics is now also apparent within the humanities. The authors point to an increase of popularity in research strands such as New Materialism, Object-Oriented Ontology or New Medium Theory. This, they add, also entails a shift away from discursive or ideologically minded approaches. Machine-centric ontologies, in which human experience is considered less significant than the historical media processes of collecting, storing and retrieving data, in fact reinforce the political goals of the big businesses owning today's biggest datasets (cf. Galloway 2013: 347). The authors proceed to rightfully question the move away from discursive and political approaches to the data that society produces. Yet, "[an] adherence to the horizon of meaning is a strategic critical resource in the face of theoretical tendencies that reproduce the correlational logic of the database by focusing on patterns and effects rather than on interpretations or explanations" (Andrejevic et al. 2015: 382).

In other words, digital methods, data mining and distant reading all fit in an era of information capitalism involving proprietary platforms that engage in mass customization, targeting and personalization. This implies we must approach digital tools for text research as techno-economic constructs, enabling certain types of knowledge and subjectivity, instead of ostensible 'post-ideological' sciences that help us gauge reality instrumentally. It means to emphasize that any aggregate analytical attempt should embark from and stay focused on the historical, experiential, imaginary and ideological functions of discourse. This inherently goes against the 'real time' data analyses where text mining serves the purpose of predicting certain trends (Mischne and Glance 2006; Asur 2010; Bollen 2011; Lidman 2011; Wakamiya et al. 2011).

Data analytics, in short, might be used more modestly, as a form of data exploration. As Matthew Jockers (2013) has rightfully emphasized, computational text analysis allows us to support or challenge existing theories and assumptions, while calling our attention to general patterns and missed trends in order to better understand the context in which individual texts, words, or features arise. In the

process of distant reading, as opposed to close reading, the reality of the text undergoes a process of deliberate reduction and abstraction, and the distance in distant reading is considered not an obstacle but a specific capacity for knowledge (Moretti 2005: 1). Computational results may be used to provoke a directed close reading, and this is where we get to hybrid methods in which close and distant reading methods coalesce (see for instance Ramsay 2011, and the methods adopted by Veinot 2007; Awan et al. 2011; Procter et al. 2013).

What might be gained by a computationally aided text analysis? Most fundamentally, it allows one to trace connections, patterns, and other discursive 'hints' in databases that could not be made by humans, due to their scope. However, in online environments we often find ourselves dealing with unstructured data (Ampofo et al. 2015) that does not conform to a stringent formal schema or type: this means that a procedure of hypothesis testing to distinguish between these forms of data is often not possible. Rather, we may want to discover themes or discourses in a corpus of texts that allow us insight into the ideologies, attitudes, sentiments or discursive logic inherent in language. We will consider the possibilities for such an approach in a specific case study: that of contemporary forms of online travel writing.

Case study: Online travel writing

Travel writing, in the literary arena, has traditionally had close connections with both fiction and autobiography. It may involve a breadth of stylistic, formal or generic forms, such as novelistic characters and plot line, poetic descriptions, historical information, essayistic discursiveness, or autobiographical elements (Swick 2010; cf. Theroux 2014). This multifariousness offers the writer "a way to show the effects of his or her own presence in a foreign country and to expose the arbitrariness of truth and the absence of norms" (Blanton 2002). The haphazard formal boundaries of the genre mirror the kinds of experiences it describes: many definitions of travel stress the open-endedness and instability that belong to its practice – and thus also to the stories written about it. Many writers (cf. Raban 2011; Mayes 2012) underline the explorative, wayward and imaginary dimensions of travel, and the authorial position associated with its recounting. Well-rehearsed as this perspective on travel authorship is, we might add to it that by far the most popular form of travel writing nowadays occurs in a different context (and with a different purpose), namely online. Here, we find new mediations of travel, such as travel blogs and travel review and recommendation platforms. These environments have yielded genres of travel writing in their own right, which have as of yet not been sufficiently indexed and analyzed.

The methodological deficit of not considering online genres of travel writing exemplifies an established pattern in the literary analysis of travel writing. As

Kuehn and Smethurst note, travel writing was for a long time no certified topic of scholarly attention, like its 'more prestigious cousins' such as the novel, poetry or drama. This changed in the 1980s, when the counter-traditional wave in the humanities famously declared the end of grand narratives, and started engaging with minor and marginalized texts (Kuehn and Smethurst 2015: 1). This chapter proceeds further in that direction, offering a transdisciplinary approach into digital environments and the everyday-life discourses one finds therein. Silverman (2006) has called such discourses "naturally occurring data", defined as opposed to manufactured or provoked data – i.e., data that is not dependent on the researcher's intervention. If it is clear that many people nowadays make sense of the world through the lens of tourism, its discourse should be sought after in everyday small talk rather than in some separate field of activity (Edensor 2001; Thurlow and Jaworski 2015) – where the 'everyday' does not equate to the trivial or inconsequential, but to innocuous texts in which the ideologies, identities and symbols of tourism reverberate. Travel writing, in other words, is in need of more 'folkloristic' endeavours that study forms that would not have been possible pre-Internet.

In the context of travel and tourism research, text mining methods have been applied to understand tourist motivations, behaviors and sentiments. Magnini et al. (2011), for instance, have used such methods to analyze the primary sources of customer delight by considering 743 travel blog entries in which phrases such as 'delightful surprise' were used. However, numerous humanities scholars have expressed their concerns with these kinds of digital methods and the possibilities they might bring to the table. Boyd and Crawford summarize these concerns by warning that computational analysis and data mining may 'narrow the palette of research options' (2011), as the researcher may become ensnared in the positivist tactic of counting, deducing and staving – *Erklahren*, instead of *Verstehen*, in Dilthey's famous terms. The question then becomes how we can read into discourse *as* discourse, instead of inferring psychological motivations from these writings.

This question becomes more pressing as many types and genres of media we find online cannot easily be read as individual texts. Yet travel blogs, reviewing and recommendation services (*TripAdvisor*, *Airbnb*), and even apps such as *Tinder* are expressions of travel in their own right. On their own, these short pieces of text, often merely describing an anecdotal story, might not involve the same kinds of explicit social engagement that we find in many types of traditional travel writing. Yet ideological and socio-political structures do shape these discourses, and we can consider them though a distant reading approach – especially since the traditional kinds of close reading, which are traditionally used to understand travel writing, are not very well suited to the scale of the content being created. These are new and digitally native genres in algorithmic culture, and as Mahnke and Uprichard note, we need to explore the possibilities of 'algorithming the algorithm'– that is, making use of it through its own language (2014).

For instance, we might consider forum entries on *Lonely Planet*'s travel forum *Thorn Tree*. The forum, which has been running since 1996, hosts a plethora of interaction between (prospective) travelers about certain places: its goal is for travelers to "exchange travel information, advice, hints and tips" (see http://www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree/). In order to index these entries we will be looking at unsupervised methods – that is, methods that draw inferences from datasets without assigning documents to classes (Manning et al. 2009: 349). This means that the researcher utilizes algorithms that find hidden patterns or groupings in data 'by themselves'. This is the opposite of supervised methods, which make use of labelled data in which the goal is to replicate a categorical distinction that a human supervisor imposes *a priori*. Unsupervised methods involve no assumptions on the researcher's part about what will be found in the data – it is data-driven. This makes such methods extremely well suited for explorative research, for trying out different data sortations and transformations to tease out patterns in the corpus. Antal van den Bosch describes such an approach as 'shooting with many guns' (Van den Bosch 2015): the researcher can compare and contrast the outputs of different methods, which point the way towards new insights or hypotheses.

The dynamic unpacking of multiple representations and sortations of textual data already implies a hermeneutic movement. It implies that the researcher needs to bring an affinity, or sensitivity, or a *hunch*, to the table, in order to recognize a meaningful pattern as it emerges. There is no such thing as 'transparent' textual research, even when using unsupervised methods. This is also evident from the necessary selection of a specific corpus of data to index: taking a random sample of content from *Thorn Tree* will be unlikely to yield interesting results. In most cases, the researcher will come to the data with a specific topic of interest in mind, as well as preformed theoretic considerations. For instance, we may take an interest in a specific geographical context, Greece, as it is a hugely popular European tourist destination and may involve discursive content about its recent social, political and economic turmoil (most saliently, the Syrian refugee crisis and the country's debt issues).

An epistemological issue arises here. We may ask whether this type of inquiry, where a form of discourse is sought out based on certain theoretical assumptions and is then queried for any matching pattern, constitutes a form of confirmation bias. At this point it is worth revisiting Foucault, who emphasized the gaps within and, more broadly, the epistemic affordances of discourse. Discourse refers to a particular linguistic matrix that the researcher may lay bare. Similarly, the Foucauldian episteme – the total set of relations that determine a historical form of discourse – is not some "system of postulates that governs all the branches of knowledge [*connaissance*]," but rather "a constantly moving set of articulations, shifts, and coincidences that are established only to give rise to others" (Foucault 1972: 191). We ought, in other words, to take a nominalist stance and doubt the generic integrity of any *forms* of discourse that we may exhume in our endeavors.

We can speak of literary discourse, political discourse, and so on, but it is quite harder to talk about literature or politics as definite types. All forms of utterance are permeable: no set of utterances can be thought of as a delimited, structured field. To Foucault, this is also related to the role of the author, who is a function of discourse instead of an authority or originator. Instead of trying to *confirm* anything, thus, what these sortations offer is rather a technique to try out specific epistemic lenses, prisms or perspectives on a certain form of discourse. The theoretical sophistication of the argument made based on a specific type of sortation will ultimately determine its intersubjective validity.

There is also an issue of ephemerality when analyzing the kind of online data we are dealing with. Most of the textual data we find online is not systematically or linearly structured, and is highly unstable. *Thorn Tree*, too, is continuously updated, both in terms of its layout and content. This obviously leads to questions about how to perform research within the temporality of the on-going transformation of the Internet – 'Internet Time', as Karpf (2012) calls it. Studies on social media may be said to always be 'behind the times', if only because people can access these media through different interfaces and devices (Karpf 2012: 647; see also Mirzoeff 2009). The lack of a stable methodological form for examining these stochastic and ephemeral environments might also explain, at least in part, the lack of scholarly research into these forms. However, while online text research may be condemned to studying already vanishing cultural networks and patterns, we should emphasize that it might be a misguided ideal to want to compensate for the continuous reshuffling of media, platforms, or ways of talking. The goal of discourse analysis, after all, is to see the structure, the patterns, and the underlying historical tendencies of these seemingly disparate fluctuations. Thus, the question not so much becomes how to constantly update data, but when to open and close the proverbial shutter – something we will attend to further on.

Scraping & preprocessing

Web scraping (or web harvesting) is a form of data extraction from a web server using software techniques. While out-of-the-box tools for such scraping purposes do exist, many tasks will benefit from a purposefully written script that takes out exactly those elements from a website the researcher needs, and leaves everything else 'untouched'. For instance, when scraping *Thorn Tree*, one might primarily be interested in the content of the posts themselves, as well as certain kinds of metadata such as the user names and the posting date.

We can retrieve large collections of online data in two main ways: through a website's back end or data access layer, by making use of an API (Application Programming Interface), or, alternatively, through its front end or presentation layer – which is the user interface – by 'scraping' the website. An API refers to a set of

routines, protocols, and tools, drawn up by the owner of a web service, that provides access to the features or data of the service to (some of) its users. Gaining access to server-side information through an API, if possible, is oftentimes recommendable, as it is then a legal form of data collection sanctioned by its owner. The first question when encountering any web platform is thus whether an API is available. In the case of *Thorn Tree*, no API is offered. The issue that must thus immediately be faced is one of ethics. How do we decide upon the sufficiency and admissibleness of scraping this kind of personally created and privately owned data (instead of public domain data that literary scholars are often dealing with)? The Ethics Working Committee of the AoIR (Association of Internet Researchers) has published two major reports to assist researchers in making ethical decisions in their research, which we might take as a point of departure. They highlight a number of key guiding principles that have to be taken into account when performing Internet research, most of which are process and context dependent (Markham and Buchanan 2012).

One question pertains to the privacy of subjects. Surely, much text mining research would be impossible if traditional degrees of human consent were constantly required. This has led some to argue that studies on computer-mediated communication are "more akin to the study of tombstone epitaphs, graffiti, or letters to the editors. Personal? Yes. Private? No" (Rafaeli 1992). The AoIR report notes that any kind of Internet research should heed of the vulnerability of the subjects existing behind or within even seemingly impersonal research data and avatarial representations. Research should weigh the rights of the subjects under scrutiny against the social benefits of research, and meditate on what the individual or cultural definitions and expectations of 'public' and 'private' expressions are. This ethical reflexivity, finally, should be maintained through all stages of the research project (Markham and Buchanan 2012).

A few things might be noted about the privacy of the subjects on *Thorn Tree*. First, while a considerable amount of them write under a pseudonym, they could easily be traced if they were to be cited directly through a literal Google search. Yet when it comes to user posts on this forum, we might note that the kinds of discourse on offer will in most cases not contain sensitive personal information about the users themselves. Further, as users agree to the publication of their reviews, asking for individual consent seems unnecessary. The issue of legality, however, is more pressing: like many other platforms, *Thorn Tree* owns all of the content created by its users,[40] and using a scraper without written permission is not allowed in its terms of service. Any researcher wishing to undertake a scrape will thus have to tread lightly and typically check their university's ethical board, as well as their country's legal rights about copyright, fair use and intellectual property rights, before devoting time into the data gathering process. It is to be noted that in many countries' legal frameworks there is a difference between the legality of scraping

[40] See http://www.lonelyplanet.com/legal/website-terms/. All online sources were accessed on 24 June 2016.

(which may constitute a breach of contract with the service provider but does not constitute an illegal act), and the legality of publishing scraped content (which is a form of copyright breach).

If the researcher decides upon proceeding with the data gathering, there are some well-known open source Python packages readily available, such as *BeautifulSoup* or *Scrapy*. These are essentially pre-programmed collections of code (mostly functions and classes) that the researcher may download to simplify the task of scraping a website. BeautifulSoup,[41] for instance, provides functions for the user to find specific HTML or CSS elements in the website's code, and then scrape the content 'within' those elements. The user then simply writes a loop using these functions, which starts on a user-defined search query (for instance, the main forum page for Greece[42]) and accesses all the pages in the search results, while retrieving the content for each entry. One notable best practice for scraping is to spread out the requests to the server when writing a scraping script, so that the server does not overload. The data is typically saved into a manageable file format (such as a .csv [Comma Separated Values] or .xml (Extensible Markup Language) file), which can be accessed with another script in the pre-processing stage.

It should be noted that scraping involves a number of caveats. Firstly, scraping scripts are highly unstable, as websites tend to be updated continually and even a single change in the HTML format of a page can destabilize a script. Secondly, scripts will often automatically 'click through' subsequent pages of a website (for instance, by finding the 'next page' tag in the HTML of a page). The researcher should therefore implement a method for detecting duplicates in the scraped entries. Blogs or platforms may be organized in unexpected ways, and duplicate posts are fairly common. Since many scraping scripts are imperfect, we need to check whether there are any duplicates in the downloaded list of text files. One way of programmatically doing this is through using a hash table, which in this case attributes the byte size of every text file in our collection to a unique identifier. When two identifiers are the same, we can remove the duplicates.

Another issue pertains to the syntactic peculiarities inherent in social media texts, with lexical variants and acronyms being regularly used in such discourses (Java 2007; Becker et al. 2009; Preotiuc-Pietro et al. 2012; Yin et al. 2012; Baldwin et al. 2013; Eisenstein 2013). These can be normalized (automatically converted based on a small algorithm, e.g. 'smh' for 'shaking my head'), but this does not seem necessary for our current purposes: in the top 1000 most-frequent words of our corpus, no such variants could be found. We can then index the size of the corpus we are dealing with. Our corpus has a total word count of 3,173,974 words: this is certainly not 'big data', in that it does not pertain to "datasets whose size is beyond the ability of typical database software tools to capture, store, manage, and analyze" (Manyika et al. 2011). We might however call it 'bigger data', which both

[41] See https://www.crummy.com/software/BeautifulSoup/

[42] See https://www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree/forums/europe-western-europe/greece

in terms of its amount and form (i.e., many different authors) might be approached differently than from a typical close reading perspective. Many types of independent humanities research will deal with corpora of roughly this size, instead of the relational databases that are usually called big data: it is argued that these 'bigger datasets' still benefit from digital tools.

If we filter our corpus by year (a valuable form of sortation if we are interested in the development and change of topics through time), we can see that the sizes of the subcorpora per year are strikingly different (see Figure 1).

Subcorpus	Frequency
2004	836
2006	5,178
2007	612,004
2008	383,107
2009	328,044
2010	333,016
2011	408,032
2012	388,796
2013	276,664
2014	249,757
2015	188,540

Figure 1. Word count frequencies per subcorpus

If we want to compare word counts between subcorpora, we would need to normalize the counts to account for these different sizes. Further, since 2004 and 2006 contain such a radically low word count, they might best be discarded from the computational analysis altogether (insofar as a comparison of their features with the other years would be based on a radically different amount of words). It may for other reasons be quite interesting to look at the very first posts on the forum, of course. We may also note that the word count in 2015 goes down significantly, as the analysis was run in August of that year. Regardless, it seems that the amount of posts on *Thorn Tree* has peaked in 2007, and has since been decreasing.

The next stage may involve differing types and degrees of data transformation. For instance, the researcher may want to remove stop words from the corpus, or choose to 'compress' the data by stemming, lemmatizing, or POS (part of speech) tagging the data. By lemmatizing all the words in a corpus, for instance, one ends up with a significantly smaller amount of word types. If we then agree that such types of reduction do not impede upon the themes that are discussed in the data, they can assist in teasing out macroscopic patterns in a large corpus. For instance, one might want to analyze a corpus based upon the usage of nouns, which are argued to be especially suitable for capturing thematic trends (Jockers 2013: 131).

In this stage, as well as the ones succeeding it, trying out different types of transformations is key: textual corpora behave in unexpectedly different ways and since we are not looking to corroborate a hypothesis but simply tease out discursive patterns in a text, we might for instance try a filter for verbs (for instance, to distinguish types of behavior) or pronouns (for instance, to find patterns of gender). Such POS tagging can further be applied to compare grammatical functions of certain words (such as checking whether the word 'travel' is used dominantly as a verb or a noun – the latter of which could possibly indicate a thematic calibration).

Analysis & representation: Word counts

With the corpus transformed, the next question is how we can start exploring the corpus for trends and patterns. First, the researcher may be interested in a measure of difference between the subcorpora (which, in our case, are composed of the years in which posts were posted). These differences can be calculated in several ways: popular varieties include Euclidian distance, and cosine similarity. First, we want to count all the words in all the files and represent them in what is called a document-term matrix. We can create one easily through the Python package *Scikit-learn*, which offers a series of options for what is called vectorisation[43] (i.e. the conversion of a collection of text documents to a matrix of token counts). We can then calculate the distance between subcorpora by comparing the word frequencies associated with each subcorpus. The Euclidean distance between two vectors in the plane derives from geometry, where it is the length of the hypotenuse that joins two vectors. There are Python packages that can calculate Euclidian distances (Scikit-learn is one of them), which take as an input the document-topic matrix.

Additionally, the texts will often be normalized through TF-IDF (Term Frequency – Inverse Document Frequency) transformation. Term Frequency measures the number of times a term (or word) occurs in a document (similar to the document-term matrix). These may additionally be normalized to take the difference in size of our subcorpora into account, by dividing the word frequency by the total number of words in that document. Inverse Document Frequency, then, is a way to weigh down terms that occur frequently throughout the entire corpus (articles, prepositions, certain pronouns, and so on), and to weigh up less-frequently occurring terms (as we suspect these words to be more 'telling' of a certain document or subcorpus). To calculate the IDF-score we simply divide the total number of documents by the number of documents in which a certain word occurs, and then taking the logarithm of that quotient. Finally, we multiply the normalized TF and IDF scores per word to acquire their TF-IDF score.

Next, we can calculate the cosine distances between these TF-IDF scores, in order to see if there are any notable subcorpora (which, in our case, are made up of

[43] http://scikitlearn.org/stable/modules/generated/sklearn.feature_extraction.text.CountVectorizer.html

years) in terms of word usage. Cosine similarity is a mathematical technique for measuring the angular similarity between two vectors (i.e. geometric structures with both length [called magnitude] and direction). Essentially, now that we have transformed our collection of words into a collection of numbers, it becomes possible to calculate the differences between these numbers. Such a bag-of-words approach will ignore many important aspects of sentence structure dependencies between words, roles played by the various arguments in the sentence, and so on (see also Mihalcea et al. 2006).

Scikit-learn offers a function to calculate cosine distances, though we need to 'flip' the measure in order to calculate cosine difference instead of similarity (to do so, we simply deduct the cosine similarity from 1). We can proceed to visualize the distances between the subcorpora using these quotients. To do so, we need to assign a point in a plane to each subcorpus, in which the distance between the points is proportional to the pairwise distances; this is called multidimensional scaling (MDS). Scikit-learn offers a function that yields precisely such a distance matrix, and we can proceed to visualize it using *Pyplot*, a well-known plotting package for Python. As we can see, the resulting graph shows that the language in the blogs are about equally distant from each other; no one year stands out in terms of word usage (see Figure 2).

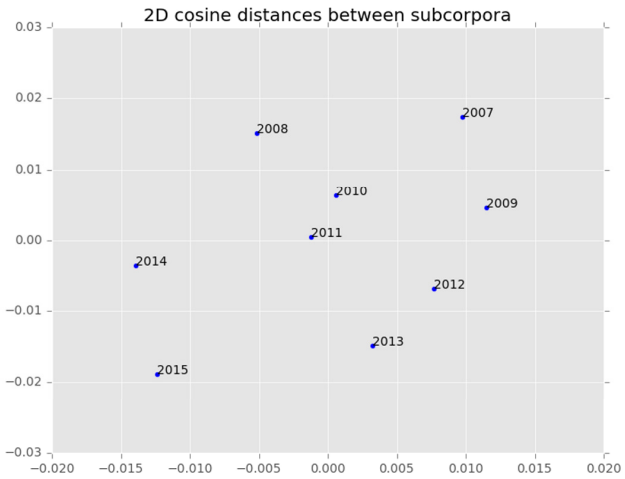

Figure 2. Cosine distances between subcorpora using TF-IDF

If we, however, add a corpus of 60,000 similar texts from the forum of *TripAdvisor* – also detailing trips to Greece, 2014 – we see that the difference in word usage with *Thorn Tree* is significant. In short, there does seem to be a generic integrity to the types of forum exchanges based on the platform (see Figure 3).

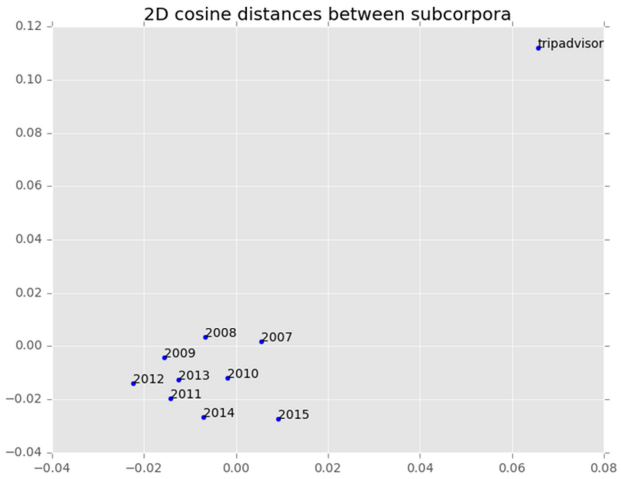

Figure 3. Cosine distances between subcorpora using TF-IDF

Next, the researcher may perform a very broad review of the notably frequent words in the corpus to index prevalent themes. One package that is very often used for such purposes, besides Scikit-learn, is NLTK[44] (Natural Language Toolkit), offering functions for tokenizing, collocations, stemming and so on. Such an analysis, which bases itself on straightforward word counts and, in steps, branches out to their linguistic contexts, is deceptively simple. It is a heuristic method, involving trial and error: it needs to take into account the plurality of modalities, meanings and functions of the words it considers; it needs to decide whether to sort the words by lemma or lexeme; it needs to accept that many normalized keywords will not be analytically interesting. Yet the method allows for a pointed cross-examination of a totality of texts that would be impossible to achieve otherwise.

It turns out that the most-used word in the corpus is, perhaps unsurprisingly, Athens (with 14,645 tokens), followed by the words 'would' and 'time'. What do these words mean? To find this out, we can look at the clusters and concordances of these words: that is, the context in which they arise. It can be useful here to iterate through the corpus randomly and manually sift through a number of concordances, so that the researcher does not favor a certain subcorpus by starting alphabetically. The auxiliary verb 'would' appears most frequent in the semantic function of communicating desire or inclination, with the trigram 'would like to' (1,171 instances). This refers to quite a common-sense theme: the intentions of prospective visitors to certain places, leading to a question that brings them to the forum. The same goes for 'time', which acts as a verb only sporadically (268 times) and almost solely as a noun (11,135 times). 'Time of year' is the most-frequent trigram (576

[44] See http://www.nltk.org/

instances), pointing toward preferable or undesirable times of year in which a trip should be undertaken.

We could imagine being more specifically interested in one certain topic: for instance, relating the two recent socio-economic crises in Greece – the government-debt and the Syrian refugees, respectively – to the language of tourism and the accounts of travelers to the country. To find this out, we could do a manual search for words that could be of interest, such as 'refugee' or 'economic'. This is where lemmatization or stemming can prove useful since, for instance, entering the lemma will also yield the instances of related terms such as the plural 'refugees'. First, we may want to check the top words in the corpus to see if any words come up that may appear indicative of our topic of interest. In our example we will find that even the top 100 words, with stopwords removed, do not include any words that indicate socio-political talk. This means we should look for those words ourselves. We could look, for example, at the relative frequency (compared to the total amount of words in the subcorpus in which it arises) of the word 'refugee' in the lemmatized corpus. In terms of time, this yields a very clear image (see Figure 4).

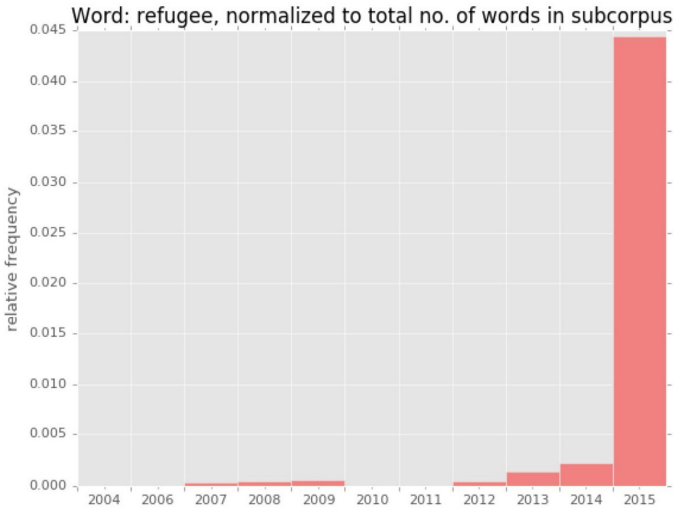

Figure 4. Relative frequencies of 'refugee'

The next step can be to see what the lexical context of this word looks like – or in other words, in what context it arises. Sifting through such concordance search results randomly has the heuristic benefit of allowing the researcher to read, line after line, the sentences surrounding the search term, so that one can focus on topical patterns. For instance, randomly going through the *Thorn Tree* corpus yields the following first posts (see Figure 5).

...as I can judge from a distance the refugees are given food and a place to sleep...
...at this time of year there are no refugees in the cyclades...
...they might think me one of the refugees or someone trying to get into...
...get a grip for heavens sake, they're refugees, illegal immigrants...

Figure 5. Concordances

We can already see several usages of the word arise: the first is that of the citizen journalist who reports on the treatment of refugees; the second refers to the grave socio-political matter, put here as a practical question, of when one might expect refugees in the Cyclades islands; the third involves a tourist who worries about being mistaken for a refugee; and the fourth is voiced by a user who emphasizes the illegality of refugees. As we can see, such a randomized concordance reading can give an insight into the breadth of the content of the comments on the forum.

Analysis & representation: Topic modeling

Another popular method to distil topics from a large collection of files is through topic modeling. Topic modeling programs automatically extract topics from texts, taking a single text or corpus and searching for patterns in the use of words, attempting to inject semantic meaning into vocabulary. A topic, to the program, is a list of words that occur in statistically meaningful ways. Topic modeling is unsupervised – that is, the program running the analysis does not know anything about the meaning of the words in a text. Instead, it is assumed that any piece of text is composed by an author by selecting words from possible 'baskets' of words – the number of which is determined by the user – where each basket corresponds to a topic or discourse.[45] From this assumption it follows that one could mathematically decompose a text into the probable baskets from whence the words came. The tool goes through this process over and over again until it settles on the most likely distribution of words into baskets, resulting in the titular topics.

There are many different topic-modeling programs available; in this chapter, we use the well-known package of MALLET (McCallum 2002). The topic models it produces provide us with probabilistic data sortations, which we may argue are indicative of certain discursive gravitational points and latent structures behind a collection of texts. The researcher can then contextualize these structures using a relevant theoretic framework. 'The Mining the Dispatch' project of the University of Richmond, for instance, uses MALLET to explore 'the dramatic and often

[45] As Ted Underwood notes, "the notion that documents are produced by discourses rather than authors is alien to common sense, but not alien to literary theory." Underwood, T. (2012) 'Topic modeling made just simple enough'. April 7. http://tedunderwood.com/2012/04/07/topic-modeling-made-just-simple-enough/.

traumatic changes as well as the sometimes surprising continuities in the social and political life of Civil War Richmond.'[46] Another example can be found in the work of historian Cameron Blevins, who uses MALLET to 'recognize and conceptualize the recurrent themes' in Martha Ballard's diary.[47]

Engaging in topic modeling, like most digital tools, is a matter of trial and error; of trying different scopes and focus points so as to find patterns in the data. As such, it is vital to perform many different analyses – for instance, making use of the lemmatized corpus, or the noun-filtered corpus, as well as different sizes of topic models (e.g. one iteration with 10 topics, one with 50, one with 100). A first thing to be noted is that topic models based on multi-user-generated data (instead of representing a comparison between single authors, as it is often done in literary studies) yield very few clear patterns, even when we sort the data chronologically. This undoubtedly mirrors the heteroglossia of the many voices on offer. However, some significant patterns may be found: in our case, it turns out that a 100-topic, noun-based model of the corpus yields one topic that immediately 'makes sense' (see Figure 6).

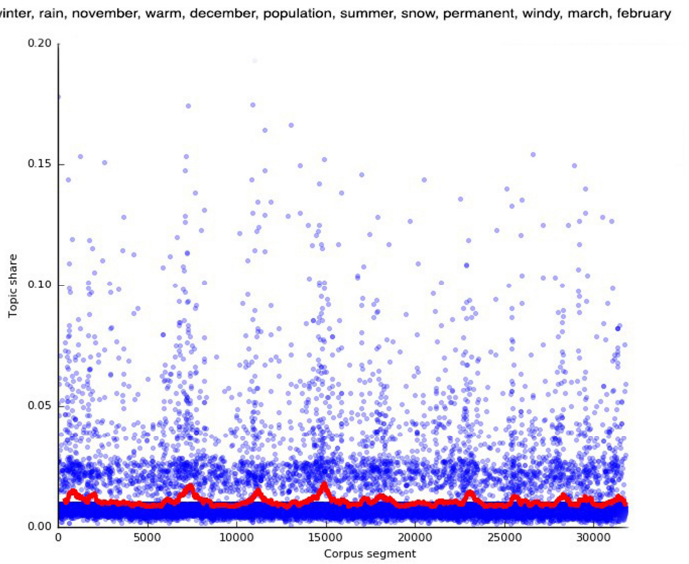

Figure 6. Notable topic model

What we see here is a rather straightforward topic that associates certain types of weather with months of the year (the X-axis 'corpus segment' refers to all of the

[46] Nelson, R.K. 'Mining the dispatch'. Accessed July 8, 2015. http://dsl.richmond.edu/dispatch/pages /intro.
[47] Blevins, C. (2010) 'Topic modeling Martha Ballard's Diary." April 1. http://www.cameronblevins.org /posts/topic-modeling-martha-ballards-diary/

documents in the corpus, which are ordered chronologically). We can see that the discourse about the weather (involving both keywords for summer as for winter) peaks in certain points: looking closer, we then learn that this is in winter, when weather conditions are unfavorable. This mirrors the earlier finding where the frequent word cluster 'time of year' indicated a typically touristic interest in the seasonal aspect of time and when to visit a place.

We could now offer some further suggestions based on this image: *Thorn Tree* users in Greece appear to speak of the weather more frequently as it becomes less favorable in winter. We might then proceed with a sentiment analysis to corroborate those findings, or start reading the stories taking place in winter from up close. We may also note that the words 'permanent' and 'population' also appear in this topic, seemingly unrelatedly. We can quickly find however that the word 'permanent' is most commonly associated with the word 'population' in the corpus. And 'permanent population', when regarding its broader context, proves to appear in the context of Greek islands, such as Crete and the Cyclades. It appears that the topic of the weather is most salient on the Greek islands. It is an unsurprising finding, as those islands typically form the backdrop for beach holidays, with the associated expected types of weather – but the way of tracking this issue through topic modeling is promising regardless.

Discussion

In the above, we have outlined several strategies to sort and analyze online textual data, for the purpose of answering straightforward questions about the formation of corpora and the discursive patterns therein. It was shown that different sortations and representations allow for different reading strategies. An important element of this type of analysis has thus far been kept implicit: it is a method involving, time and again, forms of disappointment. We will not always find meaningful patterns of relations in bigger datasets, and even if we do, they will not necessarily lead to fruitful and productive close reading and interpretation. The dataset we have used here is an example: for instance, we have found very little evidence of socio-political discourse in the corpus, and the patterns that did arise could be explained by rather trivial circumstances. We could leave it at that – but as we noted before, text mining in the humanities should not become a matter of hypothesis confirmation. What this lack of meaning implies is not that the method is unfit or the narratives it looks at are uninteresting – rather that certain tools will be found better suited for certain datasets. 'Shooting with many guns' means that many shots will not hit the mark, and communicating these misfires should be an integral part of writing papers that leverage digital methods.

Some words might be spent, then, on the function that Digital Humanities tools may have in the broader field of the humanities. In general terms, DH is a field that

is perhaps best not to be distinguished by its methodological tools, but rather by the questions that these tools can bring about. Digital methods allow us many avenues of insight into the same problems the humanities have always struggled with. As the use of digital tools becomes increasingly popular and accessible, we need to establish ethical guidelines on a case-by-case basis that deal with the novel issues that each project finds itself facing. We should also take at heart the criticism from the likes of Stanley Fish: digital strategies should not just follow whatever surprising statistical facts may appear, without due contextualization. Beyond such issues of ethics and data dredging, the problem-solving approach that DH internalizes could foster not a reduction, but a multiplication of both knowledge and discussion.

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2.2 *Interlude: Towards a procedural discourse analysis*

This is the first entry in a series of research interludes, which will be used to expand on concepts presented in its preceding papers. Here, analytical perspectives will be offered that complement the previous paper on Digital Humanities methods.

What is proposed analytically in this thesis, we may repeat, is a discourse analysis of everyday life interactions, which borrows from symbolic interactionism in its focus on context-sensitive tactics and semiotic practices of identity through interpersonal discourse, as well as the functional orientation towards language from the perspective of its social effects (Blommaert and Varis 2015: 6). This method of analysis complementing our distant reading strategies might be called a procedural discourse analysis. That is, a discourse analysis that foregrounds the procedural nature of online and computational interactions and discourse. We will explain our notion of procedures below. 'Discourse', in this context, refers to the intricate multimodal content of this construction. We can understand language, text, discourse and so on as "any significant unit of synthesis, whether verbal or visual," as Barthes put it (1957: 109). Indeed, this study will engage with all kinds of semiotic material – text, (moving) imagery, layout, sound, as well as a combination of those within digitally native forms, such as simulated environments.

The goal is not to understand the intrinsic motivations of the tourist (identity as a psychological construct), but to understand the representational construction of the self (identity as semiosis). To speak of scripts means, thus, to focus on 'users' instead of 'subjects': identity is something that is executed and used by subjects insofar as it is useful. This goes both for the users and for the platforms hosting these users: in spite of its vocabulary of 'friends', 'social', and 'collaboration', the profitableness of online sociality is the cornerstone of online social environments – not the fostering of 'community' in the classical sense. This also puts some constraints on what we may learn about subjectivity when analyzing online data. As José van Dijk puts it, we are dealing with "human input shaped by computed output and vice versa – a sociotechnical ensemble whose components can hardly be told apart" (2013: 14). The interacting entities one finds online are heteromated personas that do not necessarily converge with the foundational subjects creating and accommodating them. Subjectivity, shortly put, is viewed here through a constructivist lens: it becomes visible through people's discursive orientations towards sets of features that are (or can be) seen as emblematic of a certain traveling identity (Blommaert and Varis 2013).

The computational representations of travel, as we noted before, can be put to use for social differentiation purposes. Travel discourses provide many kinds of semiotic resources to constitute traveler identities (from historical characters such as the pilgrim, to the contemporary and more elusive likes of the 'insider'). They are manifestations of what Salazar (2012: 864) calls 'tourist imaginaries': representational assemblages that are interwoven with people's personal imaginings, and that are used as meaning-making and world-shaping devices. This emphasizes that identity enact-

ments are not entirely idiosyncratic; they are an aggregate of normative standards and expectations (cf. Vogler 2002). To have a voice is not only a personal matter; Bakhtin (1981) already noted its fractality, in that its application is often an appropriation or reconfiguration of another's language or voice. Such double-voicedness carries inherent friction or dialogicality (Bakhtin 1981: 324). Beyond that, the degree to which one has a voice is the degree to which one manages to make oneself understood (Blommaert 2005: 4), and in algorithmic environments this depends on computational variables as much as it does on discursive ones. If one wants to become a 'travel blogger', one needs to leverage specific elements that belong to the blogging format; if one wants to become a 'pilgrim' in videogames, one needs to follow specific procedural mechanics.

In its focus on reciprocal material-semiotic assemblages and the rejection of social or technical determinism, the reader might find a resemblance to the Actor-Network approach of Bruno Latour, Michel Callon, John Law and others (cf. Law 1992, 2007; Lee and Brown 1994; Latour 1996, 2005; Callon 1999; Hassard, Law and Lee 1999; Neyland 2006). ANT is characterized by its attentiveness to technical innovation in and through social dynamics, and applies a networked epistemology to these structures. While the ontological assumptions of ANT and the current study might converge to some degree, the method of inquiry differs. Our notion of the script means to underscore that human interaction and action co-determine the configuration of the system, which diverges from Latour's Foucauldian preference to speak not of the actor but the actant (2005). Second, in ANT, the epistemological base model is that of a heterogeneous network, the "webs of relations" as Law calls them (2007: 2). We, instead, focus not on the network of interactions, but the interaction itself. What we can take away from ANT is the notion that the dichotomy online/offline is impossible to maintain: research in the last few years has emphasized the continuities between online and offline identity construction (e.g. Labreque, Markos and Milne 2011; Ess and Dutton 2013). Most importantly, it would be quite reductive to deny the influence of online self-presentation and fashioning on the behaviors in 'meatspace' (Manovich 2013). The fact that discourses are found in digital environments does not make them at all separate from the 'analog', 'offline' or 'real' lives from which they are borne.

Following the principles of ANT, we recognize the need to address the computational contexts within which discourses exist. The concept of procedural rhetoric may prove useful here. Developed by Ian Bogost, procedural rhetoric aims to explain the kinds of expressions and arguments made by the interactive environments of video games (Bogost 2006, 2007). Bogost builds on the definition that Janet Murray gives of the procedure: the "defining ability to execute a series of rule." Bogost, then, applies this definition to look at the fundamental activity of software authorship and discusses how computational processes may be used persuasively (Bogost 2007: 3). Playing a game, then, means interacting in a 'possibility space' created by constraints of all kinds that determine the in-game choices a player can make. The player, in turn, attempts to understand this structure of the game in order to succeed at it. Arguably, we can

leverage the insights of procedural rhetoric on a divergent range of computational processes, not just games in a strict sense: for instance, they can be used to make sense of the sortation of information on travel platforms, or the types and layout of posts on the front page of professional travel blogs.

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CHAPTER 3

Blogs

3.1 Here I am: Authenticity and self-branding on travel blogs

Tom van Nuenen (2015). Here I am: Authenticity and self-branding on travel blogs. *Tourist Studies* 16(2): 192-212. doi: 10.1177/1468797615594748

Introduction

When Dave and Deb, the couple behind the travel blog *The Planet D*, first started discussing how to become full-time travelers, they had all kinds of ideas. In a promotional video, Deb tells how they were considering either teaching English as a second language, or opening a bar in Honduras. In the end, the couple decided to put themselves on the map as 'Canada's adventure couple', aspiring to show the world how adventure is for everyone. 'If two regular people can do it, everyone can', Deb says smilingly. Percussive island groove music kicks in, accompanying a sequence of adventurous travel images.[48]

We are visiting the 'About' page of *The Planet D,* a professional travel blog receiving about 190,000 views per month.[49] In the introductory video we have just been watching, the couple maintaining the site highlights the importance of self-branding. Earning money by traveling, Deb explains, required years of marketing, saving money, and commitment. "We weren't a known commodity. Who would hire someone they had never heard of?" Dan and Deb fashioned a self-identity, performing the tasks necessary to obtain and support it. Halfway through the video, though, the music abruptly changes – the upbeat Caribbean tune makes way for a meditative, cinematic soundtrack. Deb describes how she and her husband are getting rid of all their stuff so as to be devoid of possessions. "I feel so more enriched now, not having the need to show off the things that I have … My priorities have changed, it's about the experience now." In a matter of seconds, we have switched from a language of strategic self-branding in order to consolidate an income, to a very specific appeal to authenticity. These travelers are arguing that their journeys accommodate a state in which one can be true to oneself, contrary to the frustrating limitations of their former lives in Western society. In the mere

[48] See http://theplanetd.com/about-2, retrieved May 3, 2015.
[49] See http://theplanetd.com/media-advertise, retrieved May 3, 2015.

minutes that their video lasts, the travel couple demonstrates a paradox in travel blogging: on the one hand, there is the dissatisfaction with conventional middle-class trajectories and the desire to escape them. On the other, there is the salability of an exceptional lifestyle, the impression management involved in selling it, and the need to secure an income to keep traveling.

This article aims to contribute to empirical studies of identity and authenticity in travel writing by discursively scrutinizing 'About' pages on professional travel blogs. Constructivist in scope, it investigates the ways in which existential authenticity operates within the systems of persuasion and self-branding, which dominate these blogs. It seeks to engage with theories on socially constructed authenticity, and the bourgeois culture within which this authenticity appears. At the same time, its goal is to underline the multifariousness of authenticity, and to show how readily the concept is reduced to a function of strategic self-branding. To these ends, firstly an overview is offered of the seemingly irreconcilable concepts of authenticity and self-branding, forming the main paradox from which the analysis derives. Next, the choice of corpus is explained, as well as the methodology to analyze it. The analysis of the blogs specifically targets their 'About' pages; the space where bloggers reveal their background and motives, and position themselves in the travel blogosphere.

The revolving doors of authenticity

The concept of authenticity in tourism studies is famously contested. While in heritage studies it remains a concept of vital importance (cf. Bobot 2012), several sociologists have posed that it acts as an essentialist or materialist concept (cf. Handler 1986; Bruner 1994), or as too simple a notion to explain tourism (Urry 1991: 51). Yet its allure remains, an anchor point in the language of tourism, used in advertisements and travel writing alike (Culler 1990: 4). The insights of authenticity might best be disclosed from a data-driven perspective – not asking 'what is authenticity?' but rather 'how is authenticity used?' (Cole 2007; Rickly-Boyd 2012). Since an extensive elaboration on all the interrelated conceptualizations of authenticity runs the risk of eclipsing the analysis, what follows next is a brief elaboration on its main conceptualizations.

In the objectivist sense (Boorstin 1964; MacCannell 1973),[50] authenticity refers to an intrinsic property or quality that makes it possible to distinguish between genuine and fake, production and reproduction, original and copy (cf. Lau 2010). The epistemological essentialism apparent herein has raised questions since the first appearance of this concept; a frequently offered alternative frame is that of constructivism, in which authenticity (along with culture in general) is regarded as

[50] Though MacCannell, in his 2008 article 'Why it never really was about authenticity', writes that the creation of a strict difference between authentic and inauthentic was never his intention.

emergent, performative, and socially negotiated, as part of the 'political economy of taste' and the right to authenticate (Bruner, 1994; Olsen, 2002). The third conceptualization of authenticity – which in this article is related to the second one – is that of existential authenticity, an experience-based category (Wang 1999; Noy 2004; Steiner and Reisinger 2006) standing in a long tradition of continental philosophy that explores the nature of becoming a wholesome, fulfilled and unified subject. Existential authenticity refers to an existential state in which one exists in accord with one's sense of one's self, asserting one's will when confronted with choices, finding the courage to face the anxiety of the meaninglessness of existence, or to reject the limiting conformity of an identity shaped by external motivations. In the Heideggerian sense, authenticity means to be '*eigentlich*' (*eigen* as own, proper, peculiar); taking responsibility for being one's own. Becoming who you are means identifying what truly matters in the historical situation and social community in which you find yourself (Guignon 2004; Heynders 2015; cf. Taylor 2003).

It is important to underscore that existential and constructivist authenticity are not mutually exclusive categories; in fact, the former is often inflected and negotiated by the latter. This becomes clear if we look at the commoditized and consumerist economic context in which existential discourses are situated. The discourse of *being* or *becoming oneself* is borrowed from by marketing strategies – its most overt application arguably being the practice of self-branding. Emerging in the late 1990s, self-branding is the metaphorical expansion of the practices of marketing of branded goods and services into the realm of individual workers, freelancers, and entrepreneurs. It pertains to the conscious construction of a self-image in order to produce cultural or material profit (Hearn 2008); a form of persuasive communication that works to colonize the lived experience of consumers in the interests of capital accumulation. Individual strengths and uniqueness are used as promotional tools towards a target audience (Shepherd 2005). Self-branding serves to produce identity by "taking control of the processes that affect how others perceive you, and managing those processes strategically to help you achieve your goals" (Montoya 2002: 7; cf. Hemetsberger 2005). It emphasizes explicit self–packaging: here, authenticity depends not so much on individuals' internal sets of skills, motivations, and interest but rather on how effectively they are branded (cf. Lair et al. 2005: 308).

The authority of the exciting, individually scripted representation of reality, instead of reality itself, has led to the post-modern study of authenticity (Wang 1999). Postmodernist studies focus on the experienced *lack* of authenticity, with concepts such as simulacra (Baudrillard 1994) or hyperreality (Eco 1986), and protagonists such as the post-tourist (Feifer 1985): fragmented and decentered selves who are no longer interested in authenticity in its objectivist or existential sense. Put in aphoristic form, the postmodernist framework holds that the more authentic the representation is, the more real it is (McCrone et al. 1995: 46). And while this notion of intrinsically and instrumentally motivated authenticity seems

distant from its existential predecessor, the two tend to be taken as synonyms. A recent example of this can be found in Kane (2012), who offers a Bourdieusian critique of the mythologies surrounding adventure tourism. According to Kane, adventure tourists use blogs in order to 'highlight mountaineering myths, otherness, unique distinction and recognizable authenticity' (Kane 2012: 270) and thus acquire mountaineering adventurer identity, which in Bourdieu's terms is considered a form of symbolic or social capital. In this interpretation authenticity is a purely strategic construct determined by dominant individuals (such as tour guides), which tourist narratives must align with in order to be recognized at all. When summarizing the authenticity discussion, Kane adopts the moniker of 'post-modern existential' authenticity. It seems that the postmodern self-branding idiom and the existential register are often consolidated, both within tourist writings and for academics analyzing them. In light of this conflation, it is all the more important to emphasize people choosing travel as their primary *modus videndi*, to try and distinguish the layeredness of authenticity: it allows its user to both realize a 'self', and a discursive or brand-related strategy. It is both a determining function in the process of self-branding**,** and an attempt at creating a new scenario for oneself outside of conventional western societal parameters.

Analyzing travel blogs

The alleged 'death of the blog',[51] like other obituaries of reified social trends, is misleading. As Jodi Dean (2010: 33) put it, "a sure sign of the triumph of a practice or idea is the declaration of its death." Despite their continuous procedural mutation and variation (from static blogrolls to microblogs to social media profiles), which makes it hard to say what the formal boundaries of a 'blog' are, it is also clear that blogs are still a popular and influential communication medium, within which travel blogs represent 28% (Bosangit, Dulnuan and Mena 2012).[52] Blogging is also increasingly a branded practice: according to a 2013 Technocrati report, blogs are the third most influential digital resource when making overall purchases, behind retail websites and brand websites.[53] When it comes to travel blogs, some have argued that in this genre the commercial focus is not always present. Arguably, travel discourse makes use of a more personal language whereas tourism discourse employs the impersonal, factual and commercial language familiar from tourism advertisements (Robinson 2004; Meshaw 2005; Dann 2012). Yet, the discourses

[51] See also, for example, http://observer.com/2011/02/the-end-of-blogging/, http://www.newrepublic.com/article/113053/new-york-times-buzzfeed-andrew-sullivan-herald-death-blog, and http://www.niemanlab.org/2013/12/the-blog-is-dead/, retrieved May 3, 2015.

[52] Within the corpus under analysis here, many blogs report attaining over 200,000 visitors per month. *A Luxury Travel Blog* receives more than 400,000 unique visitors per month (see http://www.aluxurytravelblog.com/about, retrieved May 3, 2015).

[53] See http://technorati.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/tm2013DIR3.pdf, retrieved May 3, 2015.

associated with travel and tourism can also intertwine, as bloggers rely on a travel discourse of going off the beaten path while being encapsulated in a touristic system of advertising and, in the case of using a blog service, uniform content organization (Azariah 2012b).

Several theorists have stressed the difference between blogging and diaries or autobiographical stories (cf. Chandler 1998; Hardey 2002). Blogs present the autobiographical subject in a fragmentary and reverse-chronological manner. Instead of focusing on the anticipation of the holiday or the narration of holiday stories on return, a typical blog presents writing *during* the trip. Scrutinizing blogs, researchers are thus able to investigate 'the dynamics of everyday life from an unadulterated first-person perspective' (Hookway 2008: 107). Yet it should not be forgotten that blogs also contain (relatively) fixed elements, such as the About page on which authors depict themselves, and an advertising page containing marketing metrics such as site traffic, site rankings, and reader profiles to attain advertising revenues, speaking arrangements, sponsorships and so on. Blogs are consequently often researched in the context of consumer research, destination branding and digital influence (Akehurst 2009; Bosangit, McCabe and Hibbert 2009; Magnini et al. 2012), while discourse analytical studies of travel writing have drawn their data from a range of different sources such as participant observation (Sin 2014), tourist photographs (Hunter 2010), diaries (Feighery 2006) and blogs (Azariah 2012a). Keeping in mind that tourism plays a crucial role in the creation of the narrative of the self (Ryan 1995: 95), understanding travel writing as a sphere for the construction of identity seems indeed important.

To explore the ways in which existential authenticity is adopted as a means to self-brand, the current article proposes a discourse analysis of both text and images to understand reoccurring themes that emerge within a list of About-pages. It takes a special interest in the doxic function of these semiotic recourses: the way in which shared values and beliefs are put to use for verbal efficacy. These doxa are an essential ingredient of discursive operations, aiming to influence an addressee by pointing at the commonsensical cultural axioms that authors and readers within an online community[54] of travelers share, and that determine what can and cannot be made understandable (Hall 1992; Van Dijk 1998; Amossy 2002: 466). The type of discourse analysis that is employed also stresses the performativity of language (Butler 1990); social actors semiotically situate themselves in certain groups and categories, while performing desirable versions of their identities by taking on a face, frame, footing, or role (Blommaert 2005). Within this performance as a certain persona, the speaker is oriented toward a dialogical uptake of their utterances but also normatively toward an implied reader or 'superaddressee' whose absolute and full understanding is presumed (cf. Bakhtin 1981).

[54] Although the kinds of social structuring and interaction that new online environments enable thus force us to reconsider established understandings of 'community' (Varis and Blommaert 2014).

The kind of travel blog on offer here can be defined as a set of personal webpages served from a single web domain, created and operated by one or multiple authors, dedicated to planned, current or past travel, made up from several individual entries and containing an About section detailing the identity of the author. This excludes services such as *Facebook*, *Tripadvisor* or *Travelpod*. Furthermore, these individually created blogs attract a significant audience; they are typically highly visible in search engine results, since they are usually linked to and updated frequently (Xiang and Gretzel 2010). Entering the broad search term 'travel blog' in Google, for example, yields five of the blogs studied here on the first two search pages.[55]

This leads to the question of how to measure popularity. Websites were selected based on their 'hypertextual popularity': their appearance on lists presented by other popular travel websites. There is a significant number of websites devoted to an aggregate top-tier list of travel blogs, making use of ranking systems such as Alexa, SEMRush, or Compete.[56] A number of caveats arise when using such data: all these aggregate lists weigh popularity factors differently and take different blogs into account in the first place. Moreover, not every list is transparent as regards the exact criteria and methods with which data is processed, and ranking systems are obfuscated regarding their algorithmic specificity. In short, it is impossible to provide a completely balanced list of popular websites. The goal here is modest: to provide a contingent list that nevertheless includes some of the most popular travel blogs during the course of 2013 and 2014. For this reason, four pre-existing lists from aggregate websites were used.[57] These lists were selected so as to take into account different ranking systems. The websites that appeared in at least two of them were extracted. The same procedure was performed one year later, after which the lists were combined in order to see which blogs appear in both of them. This leads to 36 blogs (see Figure 1) that have remained popular for over a year, by a very specific type of Western travel blogger: people who were somehow able to put themselves in the spotlight of all kinds of discursive and commercial systems determining popularity.

[55] The search was performed on May 3, 2015.

[56] Alexa ranks sites based primarily on tracking a sample set of internet traffic-users of its toolbar for different web browsers. Compete works similarly, extracting daily consumer digital behavior from a dynamic panel of 2 million consumers from the USA through 'clickstream collection software'. SEMRush takes traffic data from Google and Bing to calculate a website's popularity.

[57] The list on site 1, http://www.theexpeditioner.com/the-top-50-travel-blogs (retrieved May 3, 2015), ranks blogs based on visitor traffic information gathered from bloggers themselves. The list on site 2, http://www.travmonkey.com/top-travel-blogs-in-google-3 (retrieved May 3, 2015), makes use of SEMRush. The list on site 3, http://www.blogmetrics.org/general_travel#visit (retrieved May 3, 2015), is an automated aggregate of over 20 factors to calculate the ranking, not providing the complete list or exact weight of the different factors. The list on site 4, http://www.travelpod.com/travel-blog-sites (retrieved May 3, 2015), weighs the average of Alexa.com and Compete.com.

nomadicmatt.com	(wanderingeducators.com)	brendansadventures.com
twenty-somethingtravel.com	travelingcanucks.com	uncorneredmarket.com
gobackpacking.com	ytravelblog.com	theplanetd.com
solotravelerblog.com	adventurouskate.com	(crankyflier.com)
ottsworld.com	leaveyourdailyhell.com	foxnomad.com
aluxurytravelblog.com	legalnomads.com	indietravelpodcast.com
wanderingearl.com	neverendingvoyage.com	deliciousbaby.com
migrationology.com	havebabywilltravel.com	holeinthedonut.com
wanderingtrader.com	(theexpeditioner.com)	(aswetravel.com)
thevacationgals.com	travelsofadam.com	amateurtraveler.com
wildjunket.com	ordinarytraveler.com	everything-everywhere.com
travelmamas.com	alittleadrift.com	wanderlustandlipstick.com

Figure 1. List of selected travel blogs

The discourse analysis focuses primarily on the 'About' page of these travel blogs: the space where bloggers reveal their background and motives for traveling, blogging, or both, while positioning themselves in the travel blogosphere. 'About' pages on these blogs are about 500 words long, and typically introduce the reader to the motives of the traveler, as well as highlights from their life as travelers. As such, the 'About' pages is where the brand is crystallized. Advertisement pages – another fixed element on travel blogs on which self-branding mechanisms appear – are taken into account, if available. Four blogs from the list were not taken into account and are put between parentheses in Figure 1, as they did not include any self-revealing information on their 'About' page. The analysis consists of four themes that emerge from the data: class-related backgrounds, existential authenticity, author/reader relationships and self-branding methods.

Background and class

To start, we should get acquainted with the bloggers: the first question we may ask pertains to their backgrounds. Shannon from *A Little Adrift* 'grew up in a sleepy town in Florida,' while Robert from *Leave Your Daily Hell*[58] notes being 'a (relatively) ordinary 28-year old, who grew up in a (relatively) ordinary family in the (extremely) ordinary Midwestern United States.'[59] The blogger emphasizes his perceived ordinariness using an ironic voice, which of course implies not being so ordinary after all – at least, not as ordinary as his place of origin. In a form of spatial anchoring (cf. Johnstone 1990), the American Midwest is used not just as a spatial reference but because of its marginal connotation. These sentences serve a directive purpose: convincing the reader that being an extraordinary global nomad is something that can be learned – and indeed, taught. *The Planet D*[60] makes the

[58] See http://leaveyourdailyhell.com/about/, retrieved May 3, 2015.
[59] Unless noted otherwise, quotes are taken from the respective website's 'About' pages.
[60] See http://theplanetd.com/about-2/, retrieved May 3, 2015.

same point, but more explicitly: the website's subtitle reads 'Adventure is for Everyone', and with that motto the bloggers 'aim to prove that you don't have to be an uber-athlete, adrenaline junkie or a part of the ultra rich to be an adventurer!' Throughout the corpus we find more of these expressions of ordinariness, which emphasize the bloggers' humble origins juxtaposed with the distinctly extraordinary life that they have carved out for themselves. Marcello from *Wandering Trader*[61] tells an archetypical story of self-made success – coming to the USA with nothing at a young age, working multiple part-time jobs while studying, pulling all-nighters, and so on. The pictures and the captions accompanying them reinforce the blogger's current successful lifestyle (see Figure 2).

The blogger offers snapshots of the extraordinary life of a cosmopolitan; a visual tricolon of doxic exoticism, including masculine felines, the mythical frame of the Taj Mahal, and a mountain vista forming the backdrop of the blogger's office. His T-shirt on the middle picture, reading 'the best job in the world', is itself an advertisement for *Wandering Trader* and affiliate websites, where users can apply for day trading seminars: the blogger teaches others 'how to have their own freedom and leave (sic) a life of financial freedom through day trading.'[62] The narrative of humble beginnings serves as proof of the manufacturability of the blogger's life, and the possibilities readers have to replicate this narrative (more on this further below).

Figure 2. Screenshot from *Wandering Trader's* 'About' page

For now, this focus on ordinariness leads to the question of what kinds of previous jobs these bloggers have had. The type of anti-touristic 'travel' on offer in these blogs has often been found to be the preserve of mainly white, middle class, relatively wealthy and educated people (see for example Week 2012). It indeed

[61] See http://wanderingtrader.com/about/, retrieved May 3, 2015.

[62] It should be noted that the act of blogging itself essentially consists of routines and practices that prevent 'freedom': bloggers need to write regularly in order to maintain readership, search for internet cafes to upload their stories, keep an eye out for power sources to charge their laptops, scout for perfect appealing locations, organize their photos to determine which ones are worthy of sharing, and so on.

turns out that, apart from a university diploma (which is held by at least 30 out of the 32 bloggers),[63] several of the bloggers analyzed here were previously employed as writers – and continue to offer themselves in the capacity of freelance writing. The past does seem of importance: Gary Arndt from *Everything Everywhere*[64] sold his business to a multinational corporation, granting him enough money to support himself on the road. Corinne of *Have Baby Will Travel*[65] describes herself as 'a veteran television producer who enjoyed a successful career with Canada's largest broadcaster.' And Sherry from *Otts World*[66] writes: "I quit my corporate IT job in 2006 and said goodbye to blackberries, meetings and New York City." She further notes that "my eyes were opened to possibilities and the beauty of simplicity; I didn't want to go back to my old corporate existence. Instead I sold my possessions and relocated to Vietnam to teach ESL, do photography, and continue building a blogging and writing presence." The blogger demonstrates a dislike of the type of excess that comes with a successful career. Of course, the alternative scenario she presents fits in with the spiritual movement since the 1970s of 'turning East' (Cox 1977; Mehta 1979). It involves the upper-middle-class involvement with, and subsequent commodification and marketing of, eastern religion. While this blogger has determinately turned away from branding products, she is still branding herself, reconciling her search for an existentially authentic, 'simple life' in the East with the branding techniques reminiscent of those she employed in her former profession. Taking photos and teaching to foreign children, the two things the blogger has undertaken abroad, are well-known forms of capital that reinforce the 'adventurer' traveler identity. While the location may have changed, the branding logic stays the same.

The paradoxical simultaneity of corporate success and anti-corporate sentiments has been captured by David Brooks' paradoxical concept of 'bohemian bourgeoisie' (wittily abbreviated as *bobo*). Bobos are the highly educated, successful individuals in the open-ended meritocracy; the managerial class of the late 20th century. However, they are also influenced by the discourse of the 1960s 'critical generation'. Criticism, thus, has become part of the system. Bobos have grown up in a late modern corporate environment, with an authenticity lexicon of 'thinking outside the box' and praising misfits, artists and rebels, while having a negative disposition towards any mainstream outings of luxury (Lindholm 2008: 59). As Brooks puts it, they are "affluent yet opposed to materialism. They may spend their lives selling yet worry about selling out" (Brooks 2000: 41).

While nearly all the bloggers here are part of the well-educated higher middle class, several of them highlight the fact that they had left home without a noteworthy savings account (such as *Nomadic Matt*[67] or Derek from *Wandering*

[63] Additional information was retrieved from the LinkedIn profiles of these bloggers.
[64] See http://www.everything-everywhere.com/about-me/, retrieved May 3, 2015.
[65] See http://www.havebabywilltravel.com/about/, retrieved May 3, 2015.
[66] See http://www.ottsworld.com/about/, retrieved May 3, 2015.
[67] See http://www.nomadicmatt.com/about-matt/, retrieved May 3, 2015.

Earl[68]). This theme of frugality resonates with findings by Week (2012: 192), who has noted that adventure travelers share a tacit assumption that they are less wealthy than those who are involved in mass tourism. Yet, while there are obvious gradations in financial success, the discourse of authenticity remains notably consistent throughout the blogs. *Wandering Earl*, for instance, classifies himself as a 'new breed of explorer': travelers who are both responsible about their environment, and who "confidently embark on missions to accomplish their life goals and to achieve their wildest dreams. They live unconventionally, according to their own terms."[69] The call for socially responsible travel, complying with existential authenticity as a sensibility towards community and accountability, is paradoxically combined with the discourse of efficient self-realization – a combination that warrants further exploration.

Authenticity as efficiency

Travel bloggers consistently point toward inner self-realization; chasing one's own, personal dream. The choice to leave everything behind is presented as an act of rebellion against the social norm, an 'I' or an 'us' against the world. The traveling couple from *Uncornered Market*[70] notes how everyone asked whether they were crazy when they started traveling, and Stephanie from *Twenty-Something Travel*[71] submits a similar idiosyncratic motive.

> Most of us (particularly in the US) have been told our entire lives that there is a specific life model we need to follow: go to school, get a job, get married, have kids, work work work, retire and THEN maybe if you are in good health and financially secure you can do some traveling. Well I'm not buying it. There is no one size fits all path to a happy and fulfilled existence.

A discursive pattern emerges here: the perseverance and trust in intrinsic motivations, despite illnesses or other setbacks, combined with a refusal to accept the linear path that neoliberal society presents; an existentialist narrative of *freedom* to become oneself in spite of the proto-capitalist logic of commodity ownership and regulated work. However, this always happens in conjunction with an appeal to the logic of efficiency and usefulness by which this alternative lifestyle should be constructed. Nellie and Alberto from *WildJunket*[72] explain that travel, to them, had a very pragmatic appeal: "We wanted to lead an extraordinary life and travel was our

[68] See http://www.wanderingearl.com/about/, retrieved May 3, 2015.
[69] See http://www.wanderingearl.com/new-breed-of-explorer, retrieved May 3, 2015.
[70] See http://www.uncorneredmarket.com/about-us/, retrieved May 3, 2015.
[71] See http://www.twenty-somethingtravel.com/about/, retrieved May 3, 2015.
[72] See http://www.wildjunket.com/about/, retrieved May 3, 2015.

outlet to do so." Mark from *Migrationology*[73] offers a similar motive when he notes that he "set a goal that I would never teach again, and that I would find a way to make a living online." And Stephanie from *Twenty-Something Travel* continues her previously cited advice by saying she means it in "the most practical, least hippy-dippy way possible." These motives may have little in common with existential authenticity in the philosophical sense, but the rejection of external motivations and the drive towards self-ownership is obviously inflected by its discourse. However, in these instances the road towards authenticity primarily involves taking control and strategically organizing and commoditizing one's self-development.

We can further recognize an existential sensibility in the several stories of illness and disease to be found on these blogs. Bloggers describe being suddenly struck with the need to stay on the road, comparing it to a sense of addiction. Derek from *Wandering Earl* writes: "It was exactly three days into my first trip back in 1999, as I celebrated the Millennium at Angkor Wat in Cambodia, when I became inflicted with an untreatable addiction to world exploration." In other instances, the motive for leaving is more literally connected to illness. Barbara of *Hole in the Donut*[74] was at some point stricken with Lyme disease. At that point, "I promised myself that when I recovered I would find a way of living that focused on those things that bring me joy. As soon as I was healthy enough, I left my job, strapped on a backpack, and traveled solo around the world for six months." It is a serious and earnest narrative of illness, existential realization, recovery, and the fulfillment of the newly found insight. We see something similar happen with Dan from *Uncornered Market*: he 'went to India by himself, discovered another planet located on Earth, and fell terribly ill (dengue fever). He eventually recovered and has struggled with various bouts of the travel bug ever since.' Marcello of *Wandering Trader*, while not falling ill, mentions "getting kidnapped and detained in some of the most dangerous places in the world," while Kate from *Adventurous Kate*[75] has "been shipwrecked in Indonesia," and Beth Whitman from *Wanderlust and Lipstick*[76] has "had a hand grenade pulled on her in Cambodia."

These narratives of perseverance and danger can be interpreted as forms of capital for the adventure traveler identity (cf. Kane 2012); intense physical confrontation with the world is beneficial to the discursive construction of authenticity. At the same time, these events and experiences should not be solely understood as strategic discourse, but also as meaningful stories. Consciously sought after high-risk situations have been labeled 'edgework' by sociologist Stephen Lyng (2005). They allow educated, middle-class Western people to resist the experience of being controlled by society, to differentiate themselves from the comforts, safeties and moderations of their native bourgeois society, and offer a Weberian re-enchantment

[73] See http://www.migrationology.com/about/, retrieved May 3, 2015.
[74] See http://www.holeinthedonut.com/about/, retrieved May 3, 2015.
[75] See http://www.adventurouskate.com/about-this-blog/about-kate/, retrieved May 3, 2015.
[76] See http://www.wanderlustandlipstick.com/about-us/, retrieved May 3, 2015.

of the world. Yet, as Lyng himself notes, there is a paradoxical synergy between the skills, competencies and symbolic resources of edgework practices and the imperatives of late modernity, such as the necessity to take voluntary entrepreneurial risks in order to achieve better results. In this context, the interest in dangerous scenarios that these bloggers share can be seen as a procuration of skills that will be useful at home.

Yet, the relationship these bloggers have with their Western homes and backgrounds is more complex. These are perpetual travelers, and the question arises whether or not they want to go home at all. How do these bloggers relate to time and the temporariness of their travels? A valuable pointer can be found in the counterpart of 'facing death', which is often employed in the blogs: following or living your dream, or living life to the fullest. Caz and Craig of *Y Travel Blog*[77] note that "life is short and there never will be a perfect time for you to live your dreams," while Christy and Scott of *Ordinary Traveler*[78] notify their readers that "life is too short to do something you don't love." Indeed, these axioms of 'living in the moment' are reminiscent of the present-tense awareness that belongs to an existential mindset. True adventure is "temporally bracketed" (Redfoot 1984: 293), and the true adventurer is the prime example of the ahistorical human: "On the one hand, he [sic] is not determined by the past...; nor, on the other hand, does the future exist for him" (Simmel 1971: 90). However, constantly reminding oneself that time is limited, and that life should be maximized, very much implies historical awareness. This awareness seems much more prevalent than any form of 'tourist angst' (Fussell 1980; MacCannell 1989) – the feeling tourists display towards fellow vacationers whenever they come into contact with, and seek to distance themselves from, them. Here, we recognize not an intrapersonal angst directed at others, but an intrapersonal angst of the temporariness of their travels and lives.

This phenomenon can be further highlighted when we see what happens as these bloggers *do* get back home. Corinne from *Have Baby Will Travel*[79] was 'lured back to Canada's largest media company', returning to her former job and maintaining the narrative of corporate success after the journey has ended. The bloggers from *Traveling Canucks*[80] note that 'the lessons learned from long-term travel gave us the courage to pursue life's next great challenge – raising a family'. Here, the goal-oriented and efficient project of traveling is followed up by another (albeit stationary) one. Yet the bloggers who have returned and keep maintaining their blog usually add a clause reassuring the reader that this sedentary behavior does not undermine their identity as travelers. *Adventurous Kate*, when settling with her boyfriend in London, noted: "I will absolutely keep up the traveling, both solo and with him!" and the *Travels with Adam*[81] author, while living in Berlin, is

[77] See http://www.ytravelblog.com/about-us-2/meet-caz-and-craig, retrieved May 3, 2015.
[78] See http://www.ordinarytraveler.com/about/, retrieved May 3, 2015.
[79] See http://www.havebabywilltravel.com/about/, retrieved May 3, 2015.
[80] See http://travelingcanucks.com/about/, retrieved May 3, 2015.
[81] See http://www.travelsofadam.com/about/, retrieved May 3, 2015.

'continually traveling around Europe and the rest of the world.' These bloggers show a reconciliation of identities: being both an erratic, youthful nomad and a stable homebuilder. Their traveling should be seen as part of a configurable and modular lifestyle.

The author/reader relationship

Let us now consider how bloggers relate to their audiences. Several of the authors, once inspired by others to start their peripatetic lifestyle, aim to pass down the same inspiration to their readers. As Nomadic Matt puts it: "This website is here to inspire you the way those five backpackers in Thailand inspired me." Brendan of *Brendan's Adventures*[82] quotes himself on his 'About' page: "If you seek guidance you need not look further than your own desires – Brendan van Son." And Dave and Deb from *The Planet D* believe "that everyone has the potential to live their dreams." The narrative of chasing one's personal dream mentioned above is projected upon the reader. We can start to fill in the characteristics of the super-addressee in these blogs: the reader, firstly, is someone in need of narrative inspiration to conquer their fears and doubts. Caz and Craig from *Y Travel Blog* claim to provide precisely that inspiration when addressing their superaddressee:

> We're here to tell you your life does not have to fit in a box. Screw the picket fence, the full-time job that sucks you dry, and the monotonous peak hour traffic runs. You can have this, if you want it. But, we're pretty sure you don't.

The condescending voice of these bloggers is targeted at a reader who – on his or her own – does not dare to cross the barrier that these bloggers have left long behind them. The same holds for Robert of *Leave Your Daily Hell*,[83] whose blog name alone is quite telling. His hope is to inspire his readers – 'not only to travel, but to begin living the life you want'. This leads to the next trait of the super-addressee: (s)he is unhappy with the repetitive and work-centric life in neoliberal society. Yet at the same time, the type of self-realization that bloggers provide is related to neoliberal agency (cf. Gershon 2011). Regardless of background and starting point, these people are considered to be responsible of themselves, and able to realize their dreams.

In the end, insomuch as these travelers are bloggers, traveling the world seems a means to a different end. Bloggers present themselves as both *travel* and *life* coaches, who inspire their readers to do what they already felt in their hearts but lacked the courage to do. Janice from *Solo Traveler Blog*[84] explains to her future

[82] See http://www.brendansadventures.com/about-2/, retrieved May 3, 2015.
[83] See http://www.leaveyourdailyhell.com/about/, retrieved May 3, 2015.
[84] See http://www.solotravelerblog.com/about/, retrieved May 3, 2015.

investors on her Advertise-page how "the blog encourages people to reclaim their right to time by themselves … to find strength in being who they are, doing what they want, when they want, if only for a short time."[85] Such an existential but temporary attunement to the self fits perfectly in the modular, continuously reconfigurable and personally configured authenticity ethos of late modernity. Some bloggers seem so eager to empower their readers in this regard that one senses a degree of pressure. Derek from *Wandering Earl* implores his readers: "Will you join us as well? The world would certainly be a much better place if you did." Stephanie Yoder from *Twenty-Something* travel, meanwhile, hopes to demonstrate that extensive travel "is a viable and even a responsible option. The world is there, waiting for you, if you're willing to make it happen." Not just an inward endeavor or an autonomous choice, traveling and following one's dream becomes a moral responsibility that readers ought to answer to. Yet, this responsibility seems primarily located within the individual, and not at the community from which these travelers come, or to which they are heading.

A peculiar friction arises here between two goals that these bloggers have in mind for their readers: they have to idiosyncratically travel, but they also have to keep reading the blog. This friction appears when the metaphor of travel is employed to sway visitors into reading the blog's stories. On the 'About' page of *The Planet D*, after a long string of photos showing the traveling couple at impressive locations, the last sentence reads: "Anything is possible you just have to want it bad enough. So tuck in, grab a coffee and be inspired." Anil of *foXnoMad*[86] asks his readers: "Want to travel more? Sign up to get my latest posts in your inbox." And Craig and Linda from the *Indie Travel Podcast*[87] urge their readers to "get outside and travel," followed by a button titled 'start here', which links to another blog page. Strikingly, the act of reading the travel narrative becomes a replacement for traveling. For the author, this is an act of differentiating him- or herself from the superaddressee. One is traveling the globe and living the dream, the other is reading the stories from a home computer. Fussell (1980), noting a similar point, has observed that there are two voyages presented to the addressee of travel stories. Of course, there is an exterior journey abroad – but there is also an interior voyage into the author's mind and the reader's brain. While bloggers are consistently underscoring the reproducibility of their narratives, the scenario they provide to their readers is also a confined one, involving an inward instead of an outward movement.

Adding to this is the fact that a comment section, where the audience might respond to the blogger, is present on only five of the 'About' pages examined here. On most blogs, comments are prohibited on the 'About' page only. As such, bloggers can stay in control of their self-representation, while reinforcing the

[85] See http://solotravelerblog.com/advertise, retrieved May 3, 2015.
[86] See http://www.foxnomad.com/about/, retrieved May 3, 2015.
[87] See http://www.indietravelpodcast.com/about/, retrieved May 3, 2015.

authority position they assume vis-à-vis their readers. Keeping feedback restricted can also be a way of securing advertising revenue, as advertisers might be concerned about being associated with an 'unclear' brand where any internet user can in principle contribute whatever they like to it, or even take the discussion to 'uncomfortable' directions.

Reliable self-brands

Looking at the self-branding strategies that these bloggers mobilize, several voices and footings can be discerned. The bloggers strategically write themselves into a particular niche market, and by doing so demonstrate the purchase of authenticity across different traveling genres and niches. At the same time, they do not operate in complete isolation of each other. Professional travel bloggers are placing comments on each other's blogs,[88] referring to other bloggers on specific outlink pages,[89] acting as guest writers on other blogs to generate and circulate content[90] and visiting travel blogging conferences such as TBEX.[91] Many of the bloggers in the corpus are related to each other through these infrastructures, showing how they both reinforce each other's brands and create a travel blogging community by sharing experiences and responding to each other's stories.

Adventure travel is the most popular market niche with these bloggers: there are several sub-niches targeted at budget travel, people traveling solo, as a couple, or with their families. Food-related travel is also a recurrent theme, revolving around indigenous exotic food. Jodi from *Legal Nomads*[92] focuses on affordable street food in Southeast Asia, while Mark of *Migrationology*[93] connects his genre of culinary blogging to the same type of existential discourse we have seen above: his blog aims to 'serve you mouthwatering food, but my other goal is to inspire you to get out of your comfort zone, set goals, and pursue what you're most passionate about.' In other cases, bloggers do not offer a distinct genre of writing, but simply underline their marketable identity. Robert from *Leave Your Daily Hell* perhaps provides the most compelling example (see Figure 3).

[88] See for example http://uncorneredmarket.com/travel-underwater-utila-honduras/, retrieved May 3, 2015.
[89] Outlinks are URLs that allow users to visit other sites. See for example http://twenty-somethingtravel .com/resources/, retrieved May 3, 2015.
[90] See for example http://www.nomadicmatt.com/travel-blogs/visiting-the-amazon-rainforest-in-bolivia/, retrieved May 3, 2015.
[91] Several bloggers in the corpus, for example, appeared as speakers at TBEX 2014. See http://tbexcon.com /2014-north-america/, retrieved May 3, 2015.
[92] See http://www.legalnomads.com/about, retrieved May 3, 2015.
[93] See migrationology.com/about/, retrieved May 3, 2015.

Figure 3. Screenshot from *Leave Your Daily Hell*'s 'About' page

Here, the blogger depicts himself as 'the ideal travel blogger' for his potential commercial partners. Advertising incitement is given through a compilation of photos depicting different sceneries, resembling typical travel advertisements (deserted beaches, indigenous people, 'foreign' culture, and so on). The heavily stylized photos are an important part of the traveler identity: the photographer, here, frames himself as an artist rather than a tourist (cf. Week 2012) by subscribing to a typical visual language where no other tourists can be seen. The function of these photos is to connect 'place to face'; locations are inserted as commodities to increase the value of the marketed self. These representations of waywardness are reminiscent of those on the page of *Wandering Trader* – yet, while that blog uses pictures to show the reproducibility of a certain narrative (one would be able to do the same if one would start day trading), the voice of this blogger is not aimed at readers but at companies, in order to show his proficiency in the visual codes of global travel. These codes borrow from the register of existential authenticity: the pensive, meditative and carefree indexes in these pictures, spiritual signs and pictures with indigenous people all communicate a sense of waywardness and wholesomeness.

Further to be found on these Advertise, Media or 'Work with me' pages are indications of the kind of audience the bloggers attract and the market value their product holds, often referring to the metrics of industry leading corporations such as Google. Bloggers detail the number of people visiting the blog monthly, offer

demographic data, and present social media statistics. Several of them add logos of global brands that they have worked with. Alongside these figures and graphs, they offer all kinds of advertising services, such as affiliate links, banners, sponsored posts, reviews, social media campaigns, bespoke content, sponsored trips, contests and giveaways, or speaking engagements. These are all tried and tested business practices of 'co-branding' (Blackett 1999): the blogger's authorial persona is connected to and reinforces other brands, such as guides, booking companies, and credit cards. And of course, this works both ways: the use of brands involves a vastly complex network of relations determining credibility and social capital, especially in the context of traveling versus tourism (the use of *Lonely Planet* tour guides, for example, might be regarded as a lack of true expertise when it comes to adventuring). It then comes as no surprise that bloggers show a highly strategic attitude when it comes to being connected to certain brands. There are differences between these bloggers in their willingness and skills to brand their content; Nomadic Matt, for example, explains he attains his resources from affiliate links and travel books. Both are offered on his 'travel resources' page. Several links refer to the companies the blogger considers 'the best companies out there and the ones that continually offer the best deals.'[94] While Nomadic Matt underscores that the commission he earns for these sponsored links does not influence his judgment, the reader cannot be sure where exactly the authentic meets the brand. In the footer of the page, the author adds that 'some of the links above are affiliate links' – meaning it is impossible for the reader to tell whose interests are served with these links, and whether the blogger is offering a service for personal or financial reasons. In a similar vein, Robert from *Leave Your Daily Hell* promises to 'discreetly weave your brand into a relevant article, either new or existing, that engages the full attention of my audience.'

The entanglement of commercial interests in personal stories creates tension: it could potentially cause harm to the credibility of bloggers in the eyes of their readers. Several blogs therefore contain disclaimers about the compromises that their creators have to make, and make sure to mention/highlight the services that they do *not* offer. The blogger of *Leave Your Daily Hell*, when discussing sponsored reviews, adds: "The bad news? I don't write positive reviews in exchange for money." The writers of *Y Travel Blog* state: "Please know that all reviews will be honest … Our readers come first, and it is always our intention to provide them with the best information and honest advice."[95] Professional travel bloggers tread the fine line between revenues and credibility – all the more so because tourists typically worry about the reliability of the stories they are told, the honesty of their guides or the friendship of the natives (Lindholm 2008: 48). To counteract this wariness, authenticity becomes an important selling point, strikingly similar to the ways in which 'indigenous' people market their culture and commodities as 'real'.

[94] See http://www.nomadicmatt.com/travel-resources, retrieved May 3, 2015.
[95] See http://www.ytravelblog.com/about-us-2/advertisepr, retrieved May 3, 2015.

The media kit of *Uncornered Market* provides an example: it explains how the blog offers 'long-form articles to plant the seed of purchase in a reader's mind'.[96] The document consists of 15 slides with detailed information on audience profiles, campaigns, testimonials and so on. The second to last slide, importantly, merges this marketing voice with one of authenticity (see Figure 4).

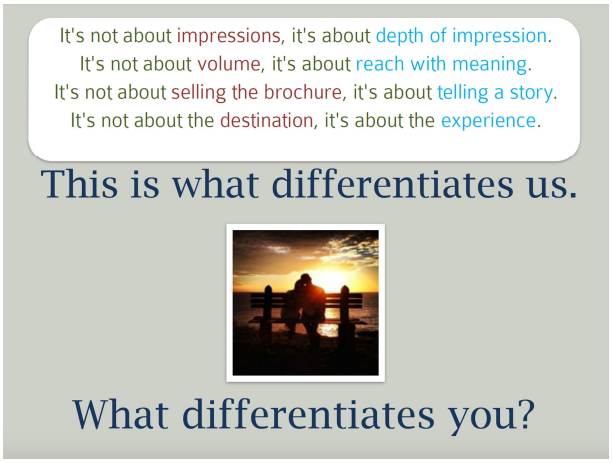

Figure 4. Screenshot from *Uncornered Market*'s Media Kit

The marketing slogans on the slide integrate words from an authenticity register, such as 'depth', 'meaning' and 'experience' into a corporate logic. Especially striking are the last two sentences: they start with 'This is what differentiates us', which is followed by a rather formulaic image: the backlit couple, overlooking a sunset. While the 'personal' or 'individual' is the key selling point here, it is supposed to be found in a generic, very much culturally recognizable and established imagery. Yet this does not mean these personae are any less 'real'. As Goffman (1959: 168) puts it:

> No claim is made that surreptitious communications are any more a reflection of the real reality than are the official communications with which they are inconsistent; the point is that the performer is typically involved in both, and this dual involvement must be carefully managed lest official projections be discredited.

The point is that the doxic personae on offer here are simply a specific presentation of self. This presentation is targeted towards an audience, which on the 'About' page immediately needs to be told what kind of brand and/or person they are

[96] See http://cdn.uncorneredmarket.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/UCM_MediaKit_20133.pdf, retrieved May 3, 2015.

dealing with, in order to maximize their attention. How these culturally recognizable personae influence the narratives in the blog itself is a matter to be dealt with elsewhere. What we can surmise now is that existential authenticity offers a powerful and influential representational discourse.

Conclusion

Professional blogging needs to be seen as a paradoxical and complex practice, a convergence of existential sensibilities, doxic imagery, and strategic self-management. In it, we can discern fundamental dissatisfaction with the roles that late modern society provides, but at the same time, the extension of the logic of that very society into the narratives that are supposed to offer an alternative. Bloggers insert discursive features and culturally recognizable personae in order to successfully brand themselves. This shows how any meaningful difference between the language of tourism and travel (cf. Robinson 2004; Meshaw 2005; Dann 2012) – in which one refers to an impersonal, commercial language and the other to a personal narrative – becomes impossible to uphold when it comes to professional travel blogs.

The main motive that emerges in these blogs is about attaining a certain type of *freedom*: the evacuation from a fixed job and home, and renunciation of possessions and luxury. This is much in line with John Urry's idea that travel, most importantly, consists of a temporary breaking with the established routines and practices of everyday life (Urry 2011), a call to freedom from social requirements. These bloggers make appeals to an abbreviated and curtailed form of existential authenticity; it is not freedom as 'thrownness', which implies and requires an acute sense of responsibility for others. Instead, the responsibility pertains to the self, which should strive for the efficient realization of a certain lifestyle. The recurrence of high education, previous success or financial stability in the bloggers' backgrounds is striking in this context, and begs the question if these global travels are really 'available for anyone'. This is of course nothing new: Bourdieu already described the assumption of classlessness in connection to the emergence of a new petite bourgeoisie: "They see themselves as unclassifiable […] anything rather than categorized, assigned to a class, a determinate place in social space" (in Urry 2011: 105). This is quite contrary to the postmodernist suggestion that in self-branding, successful images and representations are more important than social reality. Moreover, the logic of usefulness, efficiency and comfort are part of a distinctly middle-class discourse – they coincide, for example, with Franco Moretti's key words of the bourgeois (2013). The persuasiveness of the type of authenticity we encountered – a promise to elevate an already successful life to even loftier heights – should thus be contextualized by a class distinction.

The central tendency of the travel blogger discourse has to do with reconciling two seemingly incompatible lifestyle choices. Bloggers present themselves as regular, everyday people, but also note how they go against the grain. Some note how you can build a career, or have children, *and* travel the globe. Others accentuate how you can travel *and* save money. Underneath these constructions lies the most important paradox running through professional travel blogs: the ability to both become *and* sell yourself. The trajectories of existential authenticity and self-branding in this mode of current-day global travel have intersected.

Notes

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3.2 There is no 'I' in 'team': The co-construction of expertise on the Nomadic Matt travel blog

Tom van Nuenen and Piia Varis (forthcoming). There is no 'I' in 'team': The co-construction of expertise on the Nomadic Matt travel blog. In S. Leppänen, S. Kytola and E. Westinen (eds.), *Discourse and Identification: Diversity and Heterogeneity in Social Media Practices*. London: Routledge.

Introduction

"My days as 'Nomadic Matt' are no more," Matthew Kepnes wrote decidedly on March 26, 2012. The blogger, after six years of perpetually traveling the globe, had grown tired of his nomadic lifestyle. He had financially supported his travels through his blog, nomadicmatt.com, for years[97] – but his life and desires had now changed, and full-time traveling did not seem as exciting for him anymore: "Solo travel has become a lonely existence that I am no longer suited for."[98] Yet, as we write this article four years later, Kepnes' blog is still online. The blogger himself, living in New York since 2013, may have moved on from his peripatetic lifestyle but his travel blog seems not to have lost any of its traction: it appears in the top 5 of Google's search results when we enter the rather scopic search term 'travel blog', for instance. It has also attained significant 'hypertextual popularity', frequenting the aggregate top-tier lists of travel blogs through ranking systems such as Alexa, SEMRush, or Compete, presented on other popular travel websites.[99] More importantly, Kepnes' travel blog can no longer be seen as merely (or even primarily) a personal recounting of his travels: it is regularly being updated with guest blog entries, general travel tips, and interviews.

This paper investigates the semiotic processes that enable Nomadic Matt to appear as an 'expert', viewing these (co-constructed) processes through a Goffmanian lens. Within tourism studies, Goffman's dramaturgical 'model' has been drawn upon to understand touristic performances – in literature and in spectacle, as well as in terms of performance, identification or self-presentation.[100] In particular, Goffman's distinction between front and back regions has been popular in the field (e.g. MacCannell 1976; Edensor 2001). This paper, however, will not engage with the well-established front/backstage discussion, but rather

[97] http://www.nomadicmatt.com/travel-blogs/how-i-make-money-and-afford-to-travel/. All web sources were accessed on 20 February, 2016.
[98] http://www.nomadicmatt.com/travel-blogs/the-beginning-of-the-end/
[99] See for example http://www.theexpeditioner.com/the-top-50-travel-blogs, http://www.travmonkey.com/top-travel-blogs-in-google-3, and http://www.blogmetrics.org/general_travel#visit and http://www.travelpod.com/travel-blog-sites
[100] Goffman (1959: 32) used the term 'performance' "(…) to refer to all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers."

contributes to the existing literature by employing other Goffmanian notions, in particular that of the 'team'.

While Goffman's work is of course 'pre-internet' and originally geared toward explaining face-to-face encounters, his work has been found applicable to online and mobile communication (see e.g. Ytreberg 2002; Robinson 2007; Adkins and Nasarczyk 2009; Rettie 2009; Knorr Cetina 2009; Hogan 2010; Androutsopoulos 2012; Murthy 2012; Kytölä 2014). While many of these analyses underline the difference between the day-to-day interactions that Goffman described in his work and the (often) asynchronous online interactions, at the same time they illustrate how his work proves useful in the analysis of interactional dynamics, participation frameworks, and self-presentation in online environments. Ytreberg (2002) specifically notes how Goffman's insights into mass communication and advertising can elucidate specific kinds of interpersonal interaction. Mass (broadcast) media are couched in a social system in which even the general listener is finely attuned to risible mistakes in the performance (Goffman 1981: 244), which they counter by constant and conscious role performance, and 'hyper-ritualized' interactions, i.e., interactions that "(…) take the existing conventions of social interaction and condense them in an attempt to counteract the impending plurality of readings" (Ytreberg 2002: 486). These are tightly mediated, dramatized, scripted and edited – "condensed in the sense that they highlight the eventfulness of people's lives" (Ytreberg 2002: 489). It is precisely this scripted aspect of the travel blog as laboriously constructed communicative material, in a context of public visibility, which we will focus on in our analysis of Matt Kepnes performing the role of a 'travel expert'.

The idea of travel blogging as an individualistic endeavor is discussed in several studies. For instance, Pudliner (2007: 47) notes that "[t]his use of technology parallels the increasing perspective that tourism is becoming an individual act," and Puhringer and Taylor (2008: 179) offer that "[t]ravel blogs (…) are the equivalent of personal online diaries." However, Kepnes' performance cannot be viewed strictly in terms of an isolated individual performing a role: rather, his expert role is co-constructed, with both 'ordinary' readers and fellow (professional) travel bloggers playing crucial parts. Collaborative interactional efforts like these are discussed in Goffman's *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959 [1990]) through the notion of the 'team', i.e. "a set of performers who cooperate in presenting a single performance" (ibid.: 50). Thus, emphasis is placed on the cooperative effort of social groups – a "troupe or cast of players" (ibid.: 47) within which "the definition of the situation projected by a particular participant is an integral part of a projection that is fostered and sustained by the intimate co-operation of more than one participant" (ibid.: 47). People performing in teams are always oriented towards both their audiences and the social requirements posed by identifying with a team.

While the notion of 'team' has been used sparingly in contemporary tourism studies, compared to other Goffmanian insights (such as performance, framing, or front- and back regions), we find it informative in our analysis of the *Nomadic Matt*

blog. The blog is rife with interactions with other professional bloggers and audiences who ratify, supplement and sometimes question Nomadic Matt's self-presentation. The notion of team indeed also proves useful in capturing social processes of ratification. In their work on the construction of knowledge in online discussion forums, Hanell and Salö (2015) apply the concept of 'orders of visibility' to discuss the online social structure of power that "(…) renders some types of knowledge, as well as the practices that produce them, more credible, more legitimate – and hence more *visible* – than others." (2015: 1, emphasis original). They also state that it could "(…) be argued that practices and artifacts arising on the Internet to some extent reconfigure such old-established orders of visibility, as they change peoples' access to knowledge, technologically as well as socially" (ibid.: 1). While this is true, at the same time we must recognize orders of visibility that are emerging *within* online spaces.[101] In order to be ratified as an expert online, the role of uptake and the ratification of legitimacy are of essence. We can draw here on Agha's (2007: 145) notions of 'register' and 'enregisterment' (see also Stæhr 2015 for a discussion on enregisterment on social media). Agha defines registers as "(…) cultural models of action that link diverse behavioral signs to enactable effects, including images of persona, interpersonal relationship and type of conduct." Through enregisterment – i.e. "(…) processes and practices whereby performable signs become recognized (and regrouped) as belonging to distinct, differentially valorized semiotic registers by a population" (Agha 2007: 81) – such cultural models become recognized as sets of semiotic resources that function as parameters (stochastic as they may be) for recognizing acts and identities. The function of the team, against this background, is twofold. First, there is the process of 'team enregisterment' in which a team works towards and establishes a broad understanding of a certain cultural model by means of co-operation; second, there is enregisterment within the team – apparent in the processes of individuals becoming *teamable*, so to say – through the individual orientation to and identification with the team and its norms.

In order to trace the forms of enregisterment and teaming in constructing expertise, this chapter will deploy a combination of qualitative and quantitative content analysis, with a *functional* orientation towards language from the perspective of

[101] In online spaces, 'popularity' is a complex phenomenon that can be gained and generated across (sometimes different, both in terms of affordances and results) environments. While Nomadic Matt is very popular on Google (his is the 3rd blog that comes up in the Google results of both the authors when searching for 'travel blog' – as well as the first when one enters 'solo female travel'), his number of *Facebook* likes and *Twitter* followers is significantly smaller than those of other popular travel bloggers, such as *A Luxury Travel Blog* or *The Planet D*. We should also note the blog's ephemerality in general: while Nomadic Matt may at the time of writing be a popular blog in most senses of the word, online research is unavoidably characterized by continuous flux and fluidity. Here, we have also tried to ensure at least a somewhat unbiased take on Nomadic Matt's 'popularity' and visibility by searching for travel blogs with different search engines (Google, Yahoo, Bing, DuckDuckGo), on different computers and with different search settings. These searches confirm his popularity in the sense of being consistently either the first, or at least in the top three of the search results.

its social effects (Blommaert and Varis 2015: 6). The 'expertise' of the blogger under analysis here is one such social effect of his mobilization of the multimodal resources enabled and constrained by the algorithmic affordances of the blog. The qualitative analysis will be supplemented by a content-driven quantitative analysis where data from the blog, ranging from the first post on April 4, 2008 to the last one of December 28, 2015, will be used. Inspired by work done in corpus linguistics (see e.g. Flowerdew 1997; Baker 2004: 1), we temporarily de-emphasize individual occurrences of features or words in favor of a focus on the larger system or corpus and aggregate patterns and trends established there. As Jockers (2013) has emphasized, this can both yield support to or challenge existing theories and assumptions emerging from close readings, drawing attention to general patterns and potentially missed trends in order to better understand the context in which individual texts, words, or features arise. Next, after a theoretical discussion on identity construction on travel blogs, we will look closely at the construction of expert identity on the *Nomadic Matt* blog.

Constructing identity on professional travel blogs

The continuous procedural mutation of and variation in the format of 'the blog' (from static blogrolls to microblogs to social media profiles) makes it hard to say what its formal boundaries are (see, however, e.g. Herring et al. 2004; McNeill 2005; Marwick and boyd 2010; Myers 2010; Rettberg 2014). It is, however, evidently a popular and influential medium, within which the genre of travel blogs represents 28% (Bosangit, Dulnuan and Mena 2012). Yet, for all their visibility and assumed influence, within the field of travel writing studies the blog is hardly the most popular object of analysis. Kuehn and Smethurst's (2015) edited volume *New Directions in Travel Writing Studies* is a representative example here: the work discusses a broad range of approaches to the field, but there are no references to online environments and the everyday types of travel-related interactions we find there. Much of the existing work on travel blogs (Pudliner 2007; Banyai and Glover 2011; Azariah 2012a, 2012b) focuses on the technological affordances of the blog, as well as distinctions between discourses of travel and tourism. Discourse analytical research on travel blogs also remains limited to the field of marketing, and issues such as destination branding and customer satisfaction (see e.g. Pan, MacLaurin and Crotts 2007; Wenger 2008; Crotts, Mason and Davis 2009; Magnini, Crotts and Zehrer 2011).

Travel blogs "(…) offer the opportunity to reveal tourists' interpretations of tourism products and experiences, and to express tourists' impressions, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings" (Banyai and Glover 2011: 2). Those who trace the origins of this format to the earlier forms of the personal diary, sometimes refer to blogs as 'online diaries' or 'Web diaries' (Sorapure 2003; Serfaty 2004). However, we might

ask to what extent we are still talking about strictly individualistic narratives by a traveler/tourist – and, by the same token, whether it is justifiable to regard tourists merely as those on the receiving end of the structures of tourism instead of active contributors to these structures. We have to firstly keep in mind that the producer and consumer of culture, especially perhaps within online environments, are more often than not the same person – as apparent in the circuit of culture model (Du Gay et al. 1997) involving the circulating production, consumption, regulation, representation, and identity of culture in a mutually negotiated relationship between consumers and producers (Höckert 2011; Dann 2012; Salazar 2012). Further, the professional travel blog – a commercialized blog offering a source of income to its writer – should be seen as a carefully scripted and edited communicative site, to reiterate Goffman (1959, 1976). Such blogs actively and explicitly engage in processes of self-branding in which they construct the author as a specific kind of traveler, as well as a specific kind of writer (Van Nuenen 2015). The self is posited as "deeply marked by the discourses and practices of post-Fordist modes of capitalist production" (Hearn 2008: 199), a purposeful and outer-directed product, subject to the extraction of value, and composed of dominant scripts and codes of the culture industry. As such, self-identity in the professional travel blog becomes a position to be continuously repeated and enforced in order to remain relevant and valuable. For one, this means that we have to view the travel blog not just as a personal retelling of stories, but an increasingly commodified environment, and the professional blogger as an auteur who retells personal experiences and is simultaneously acting by the logic of the commercial system of tourism, offering not only personal travel experiences and traveler identities for the reader to identify with, but also promotional material to convince readers to travel (cf. Dann 1996).

Accordingly, we will next address the dual function of the blog as both a site for personal recollection and strategic self-branding through different discursive patterns. We will then move on to discuss the social process of enregisterment that these patterns are indicative of. Finally, the role of team in, and audience uptake of, this identity composite will be discussed.

Discursive patterns on the blog

First, let us take a look at the formal properties of the titles of the blog entries that Nomadic Matt posted between 2008 and 2015. We can immediately recognize the choice for specific content and the employment of specific formats – the kind easily found and indexed by web indexing software such as the Google spider.[102] Image 1 below shows a manual categorization of the 783 blog post titles by Nomadic Matt, with a focus on notable recurrent discursive patterns. We see that about half of all

[102] A web spider or crawler is an internet bot, which systematically browses the World Wide Web, usually for the purpose of Web indexing.

the titles on the blog are scripted and serialized orientations towards a specific 'order of visibility' through their organization and style. This type of *Search Engine Optimized* writing includes 'lists' (e.g. '12 things I'd tell any new traveler'), notable for their online popularity and 'clickability' – more colloquially known as 'clickbait'. We also see many instructional 'how', 'why' and 'what' titles (e.g. 'How to travel around South Africa', 'Why travel makes you awesome' and 'What I pack for my travels'), which consist of 'keyword phrases' that users type in when they search for information online.[103] The word 'Saturday' is related to a specific series, 'The Saturday City'. Finally, 'team' titles refer to success stories, guest posts ('Female tips from female travelers') or inspirational tales ('How to travel the world in a wheelchair'). These are written by other bloggers, readers and celebrities, whom we may consider Goffmanian 'teammates', for reasons discussed further below.[104]

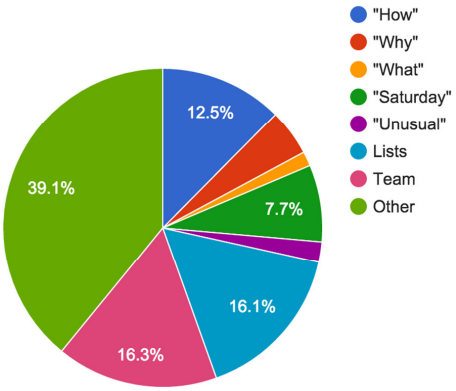

Image 1. Blog post titles (total: 783 items)[105]

Turning to the visual elements of the blog, we can see that significant changes have been implemented over the years, contributing to the blog's development into a professional, commercial enterprise. In 2008, Nomadic Matt featured many visual elements indicative of its personal nature. The blog was called 'Nomadic Matt's Travel Site', with the header showing the 'latest blog' and focusing on 'news,'

[103] Search Engine Optimization (SEO) refers to processes of maximizing a website's visitor numbers by ensuring that the site appears high on the list of results returned by a search engine. See for instance http://www.wordstream.com/keyword-phrases. This, of course, leads back to the hybridity of the blog, whose implied audience consists of an amalgam of *readers* (who enjoy themselves reading) and *users* (whose clicks, time spent on the site, and other metrics are primarily valuable in terms of advertising revenue). Kepnes himself offers a course called 'The business of blogging' which includes 'SEO tips, monetization strategies, and expert interviews.' See https://www.nomadicmatt.com/travel-tips/make-money-with-your-travel-blog/

[104] Other serialized posts can be found that would overcomplicate the below graph, such as an 'Airline Reviews' and a 'The Cost of Traveling [country]' series.

[105] In the data, some minimal overlap of 'types' in blog titles occurred, which is not represented in the current graph. Image retrieved from Google Charts under Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 License.

profiling the blogger as someone plugged into the latest updates in the field of global travel. The 'travel tips' that the author has continued to offer, in 2008 constitute a (relatively small) part of the site. If we then turn to the 2015 iteration of the blog, a remarkable change in voice, tone and focus becomes apparent. The professionally designed blog now brands itself with the slogan 'Travel better. Cheaper. Longer.', underlining the theme of frugality and cost-effective travel that the blogger specializes in, and that is constitutive of his particular expertise. There is also the directive 'Discover the art of traveling anywhere you want', with which the blog clearly furnishes itself as a space for advice and knowledge for the aspiring traveler. The blog's name is also now simply 'Nomadic Matt', a clearly distinguishable brand with a logo to boot, and the header text establishes the blog as a seven-year endeavor of 'helping 16 million people realizing their travel dreams', while featuring logos of well-known sites (such as CNN, Time and National Geographic) as 'markers of expertise' to underscore the blogger's successful insertion of himself as expert in the tourism field (Image 2).

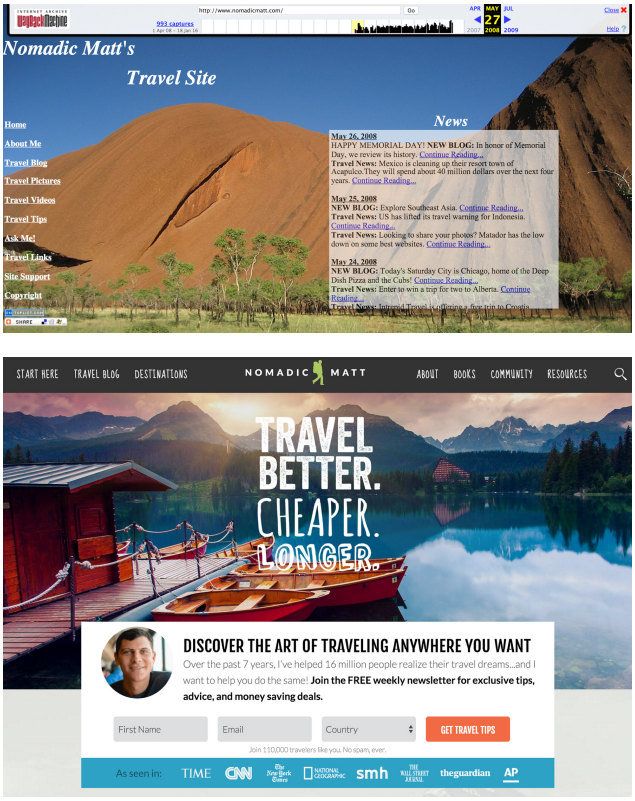

Image 2. Nomadic Matt in 2008 (retrieved from Wayback Machine[106]) and 2015

[106] Wayback Machine (http://archive.org/web/) is a digital archive of web pages.

The importance of these visual elements calls for some further elaboration. In explaining technologically mediated communications in general, attending to only language instead of the whole semiotic array of communications will in many cases prove to be insufficient. When dealing with travel blogs, as with tourism in general, the visual representation of sites and destinations is thus crucial and needs to be attended to in analysis (Rojek and Urry 1997: 5; Urry and Larsen 2011; Kuehn and Smethurst 2015: 8). The importance of the camera in mass tourism as the primary interface with tourist sites hardly needs qualification. This is also true of anti-touristic 'travelers' who reinterpret the role of the photographer as an artist rather than a tourist (Week 2012: 191) by using high-end equipment and often trying to capture something 'authentic' about the place and the lives of the people observed (Redfoot 1984: 297).

In this context, it may seem somewhat surprising that the imagery across the *Nomadic Matt* blog, a blog about an 'expert traveler,' predominantly contains stock-like pictures – e.g., a picture of a famous landmark of the city which the blog post is about,[107] or a photo of a young man (likely the author) sitting on shoreline rocks pensively overlooking the sea (see Image 3).

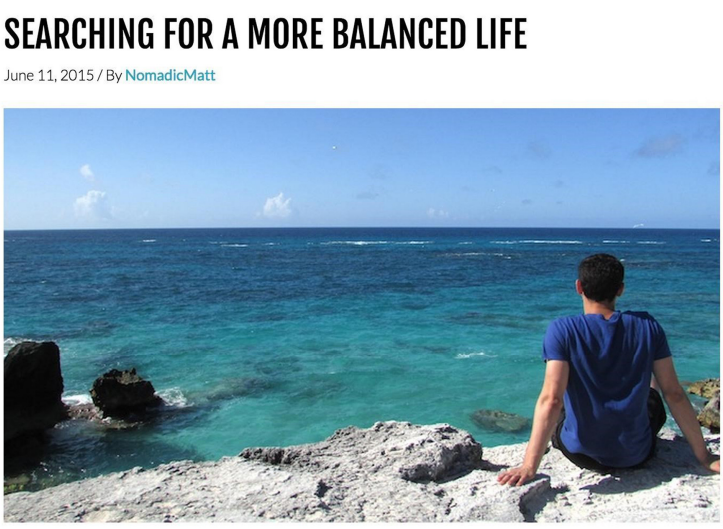

Image 3: Brochure-like images[108]

The visual style of the blog thus corresponds to the increasingly homogenized formats of commercial style in global media output (Ritzer 1993; Machin and Van Leeuwen 2004). This employment of widely enregistered, commercial tourism semiotics is not only important in the construction of *Nomadic Matt* as an expert in

[107] E.g. http://www.nomadicmatt.com/travel-blogs/the-saturday-city-lisbon/
[108] http://www.nomadicmatt.com/travel-blogs/balanced-life/

the field, but also for the 'teamability' of its author who may become more attractive to collaborate with to other bloggers, and 'readable' to mass audiences because of the recognizable format.

A tension arises here, however, as the blogger still needs to distinguish himself from his audience as an expert, while simultaneously having to portray his lifestyle as something achievable by anybody who wants it; i.e. he has to present himself as an 'anybody', too. While the blogger himself states not being a particularly 'good photographer'[109] and although it is the guest bloggers on the website who provide the kind of photography tips that fit in with the 'traveler' discourse mentioned above, the blog's visual style does more than just add texture or function as paratext. The blog's mixture of recognizable commodified imagery and personal stories and snapshots (such as the author's face in the header) works to establish the blog both as a globally recognizable commercial effort, and a more 'personal,' and as such perhaps from the point of view of audiences an easily identifiable, site of travel expert discourse.

The hybrid function of *Nomadic Matt* as both a personal diary and a strategic self-branding site can be underscored if we also look at word counts, derived from an aggregate of all the blog entries.[110] The seductive 'language of tourism' (Dann 1996) of brochures and glossies, for instance, is evidenced by the lexical clusters of the lemma 'you' (14,548 instances): we see it mostly refer to the reader who is being given advice. The verb most frequently collocated to it is 'can' (1,900 instances)[111], an unsurprising auxiliary in and of itself, but an index of the tourism discourse when we see that it almost solely refers to the deontic modality of the verb, referring to the possibility to act based on the information the blogger provides – the sights readers can see, or the things they can do (e.g. 'if you want more for later you can buy 50 frozen dumplings for $8'). The development of the blog toward a commercial enterprise can also be recognized in the number of guest posts and interviews that can be found on the blog (see Image 4): *Nomadic Matt* hosts a wide range of other bloggers as a form of co-constitutive and collective self-branding (more on this below). Looking at this ratio, we can see that while the total number of posts decreases in 2012 (the time when Kepnes himself stopped perpetually traveling), the comparative ratio of guest posts to Matt's posts increases.

[109] http://www.nomadicmatt.com/travel-blogs/travel-photography-tips/

[110] For the purpose of tracing most-frequent word counts and clusters, a custom word search function was built in Python, based on oft-used packages such as NLTK and scikit-learn (see https://github.com/tomvannuenen/corporeal). Some specific tasks in the paper were executed by using AntConc (Anthony, 2014). The total amount of words in the corpus is indexed at 799,859.

[111] Note that 'could', which also functions as lexeme under 'can,' appears only 101 times.

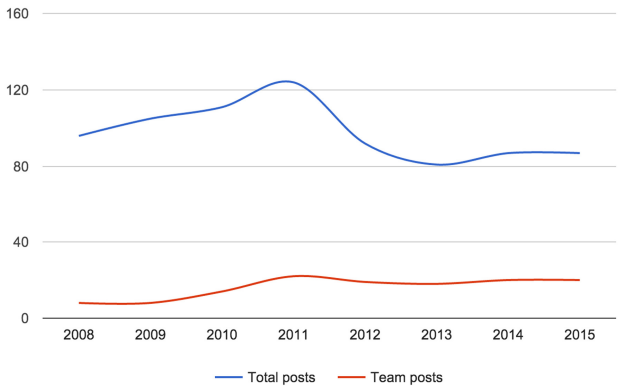

Image 4. Total posts and Team posts[112]

The enregistered expertise

Apart from the formal characteristics of the blog discussed above, which can be strategically employed to maximize visibility (and simultaneously and/or consequently establish expertise), we need to address the discursive construction of the type of expert role and travel advice on offer on this site. In the introductory video that the blogger presents on his 'About Me' page[113], the identity process of becoming a traveler is dramatized. The blogger explains returning from his first trip abroad: having been inspired by two backpackers during his trip, he had decided he wanted to become a traveler too. But there was a problem: "I knew nothing about travel. I was nervous, excited, but incredibly overwhelmed by this daunting task." 'Becoming a traveler', here, refers to much more than the simple physical locomotion of travel: the blogger presents the process as involving some form of identity work – assuming, in fact, an entirely new lifestyle – and specific types of information about which one needs to be knowledgeable. He thus sets the stage (Goffman 1959) for the type of expert role that he assumed and gradually reinforces, as a provider of this sort of identity-related information. Indeed, referred to as a 'daunting task', traveling here is constructed for the reader as something for which one needs expert advice. It is not simply about buying tickets and boarding a plane.

Looking at the chronological trajectory of the blog, we can note that Kepnes' expert position is established from the outset. The blog's very first entry, posted in April 2008, carries the title 'How I travel so much'.[114] The frequency of traveling referred to in the title is the first index of expertise, and Nomadic Matt then proceeds to disclose to his audience the 'secret' to being able to do long-term

[112] Image retrieved from Google Charts under Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 License.
[113] http://www.nomadicmatt.com/about-matt/
[114] http://www.nomadicmatt.com/travel-blogs/how-i-do-it/

traveling: wanting it enough. "If you truly wanted to travel, you would," the blogger writes: and the goal of the blog, he proceeds to explain, is to make readers realize that such travel dreams are an actual option, and not out of reach for anyone, as long as one really wants it enough. Nomadic Matt starts the post by asking:

> What is the secret to traveling long term? How can I travel so much, so often? Am I rich? Do I have a trust fund? Are all my trips paid for by someone else? What is the secret?!!! Well, while money does help, want to know the real reason I can afford to travel so much? DESIRE. That's it.

The focus on perseverance and determination (with which we start to see the intersection of travel expertise[115] and life coaching) remains dominant throughout the blog. A significant number of entries are dedicated to what might be called *rhetorical insurance*: advice for the reader on how to deflect possible criticism about their traveling lifestyle. Under the first subcategory of the website's 'Start Here' header, called 'Be inspired', we see blog posts with titles such as 'Why travel makes you awesome'[116] and 'Everyone says I'm running away'[117]. In the latter post – the entry that Nomadic Matt labels as the website's most popular article – he writes:

> I'm not sure why, but there is this perception out there that anyone who travels long term and isn't interested in settling down or getting a conventional job must be running away from something. [...]
> And to all those people who say that, I say to you – you're right.
> Completely right.
> I *am* running away.
> I'm running away from *your* idea of the 'real' world.

The blogger, in these posts, does not recount the traveling itself but rather provides arguments against actual and possible criticism of the nomadic lifestyle. By doing so, Nomadic Matt acts as the supplier of a social *front*[118] or script to his audience, and we can see that with this front, he moves away from his role as expert traveler, and assumes the role of a life coach – visible as the inspirational and instructional

[115] While in this chapter we focus on 'travel expertise', Nomadic Matt also increasingly presents himself as an 'expert blogger', offering travel blogging courses (e.g. http://www.nomadicmatt.com/travel-blogs/new-blogging-course/).
[116] http://www.nomadicmatt.com/travel-blogs/why-travel-makes-you-awesome/
[117] http://www.nomadicmatt.com/travel-blogs/everyone-say-im-running-away/
[118] Goffman (1959: 13) defines 'front' as "(…) that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance. Front, then, is the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his [sic] performance."

discourse on how readers could, or should, lead their lives (e.g. being 'awesome', 'settling down', 'getting a conventional job').

The 'inspiration' that is offered here pertains to more than a set of recommendations on 'must see' places; it also entails possible points of identification and imagined identities for his readers. It is here that we see the blogger assuming the expert role and offsetting himself against his audience most clearly, and in so doing exemplifying a more general trend in tourism discourse, i.e. engaging in the "pursuit and endless production of difference" (Thurlow and Jaworski 2015) between those 'in the know' and those who are not (yet). In the same post quoted above, the blogger even connects the act of reading to a state of inactivity. He notes: "Life is short, and we only get to live it once. I want to look back and say I did crazy things, not say I spent my life reading blogs like this while wishing I was doing the same thing." This statement also shows the intersection of the discourses of travel and life coaching: in both, the self-direction and responsibility of the individual stands in the front and center (cf. Hearn 2008: 203). Both place upon its audience the "(…) continuous business of living to make adequate provision for the preservation, reproduction, and reconstruction of [its] own human capital" (Gordon 1991: 44). This intersection can also explain why the blogger immediately makes it clear that his recommendations are not binding, and are to be followed at one's own volition. In one entry the blogger notes:

> I couldn't care less if you boozed it up all through Southeast Asia and the closest you got to seeing a local was the guy serving you beer.
> It's not what I would do, and I may write a post about why I think you shouldn't either. But if you do so anyway, good for you.
> Why?
> Because the only thing about travel that matters is that it makes YOU happy and brings YOU joy.[119]

The blogger insists on the contingency and supremacy of personal experiences, his capitalization unwittingly answering to the many critical voices that address the banality of the type of cosmopolitanism that is on offer here (Thurlow and Jaworski 2015: 50).

The pattern of unbinding recommendations can be further substantiated with a quantitative observation: the bigram 'you can' (1,900 instances) that we already noted before, appears significantly more often than the (partly) deontic modal bigrams 'you need' (354 instances), 'you will' (162 instances), 'you should' (123 instances), 'you shall' (no instances), or the trigram 'you have to' (125 instances). As one might expect, these clusters typically refer to the audience, indicating places and sites that people could visit, or specific types of behavior the reader could engage in.

[119] http://www.nomadicmatt.com/travel-blogs/i-do-this-for-me/ (emphasis original)

However, a tension appears as a result of the fact that any expert needs to recommend things to his or her audience all the same. As an expert blogger, Nomadic Matt cannot maintain a pose of complete disinterest in the behaviors of those who follow him online, or fully embrace a suggestive rather than an imposing voice. When discussing other travelers in New Zealand, Fiji and Australia, he thus writes:

> Travel isn't simply about getting on the Greyhound, being dropped off at a hostel, and then getting shuffled onto a backpacker tour and then a backpacker bar. (...) But the more I see these young travelers simply accepting this type of travel, the more I get discouraged. Is this really what traveling is about?

Immediately after the post, the blogger remarks in an editor's note: "My goal here was not to disparage people who travel a certain way (...) all travelers are equal. It doesn't matter how you travel."[120] The blogger is managing two conflicting roles: that of the travel expert who is expected to present ideas on different forms of travel, and that of a life coach on the dictum of individualism. Further qualifying this double role, in a blog post titled 'I do this for me', Nomadic Matt writes:

> Yes, I'll give you my suggestions and tips on what to see and do in Berlin. I'll give you tips about how you can travel cheaply based on my experience. I'll think out loud about the nature of travel and my personal thoughts on it as a way to help ME hash out my feelings. If you want to read along and comment, all the better.[121]

The reader can receive tips about travel – but almost incidentally, as an aside or by-product of the blogger's self-interested diary-like musings. The discourse of expertise necessarily involves taking a normative (moral) stance on the behavior of other travelers, as well as those leading a sedentary life, as expressed in the very subtitle of the blog: it is not just about traveling cheaper and longer, but also *better* (see Image 2). However, while the audience may retrieve some guidance on life and/or travel, the blogger characterizes the site as, first and foremost, a personal site of communication, and leaves it up to the readers themselves to decide how to go about it. This is also as evident in his phrasing of having "helped 16 million people realize their travel dreams."[122]

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[120] http://www.nomadicmatt.com/travel-blogs/is-this-really-travel/

[121] http://www.nomadicmatt.com/travel-blogs/i-do-this-for-me/

[122] It is not clear from the blog where the figure of 16 million comes from; what is important however, is that pointing to such a large number of people as having benefited from his expertise helps establish *Nomadic Matt*'s expert position.

Team and audience feedback

The audience, through the dedicated commentary section on each blog entry and – more indirectly and invisibly – by generating views of the website, can help reinforce and ratify the blogger's expert identity and visibility. Other travel bloggers also play a role in the construction of Nomadic Matt's expertise through guest posts and comments under his blog entries. To sustain the image of an expert class of travelers, travel bloggers seem to collectively manage and negotiate their own niche of expertise, while also incorporating themselves into a larger group of bloggers. For instance, at the time of writing, references to the comparably popular blog *Uncornered Market* appear seven times on the blog, bloggers Dave and Deb from *The Planet D* appear 22 times, Derek Earl Baron of *wanderingearl.com* 12 times, and Alex Berger of *virtualwayfarer.com* eight times. Nomadic Matt also offers a shortlist of 'perpetual travelers you should read' in several of his blog posts,[123] mentioning other prominent bloggers (cf. Van Nuenen 2015). Several of these other bloggers proceed to appear in the comment section, thanking Nomadic Matt for what one blogger colloquially calls 'link love', as to these bloggers such backlinks (that is, links from another website to their website) are valuable commodities that can significantly improve their site's search engine visibility (see Image 5).[124]

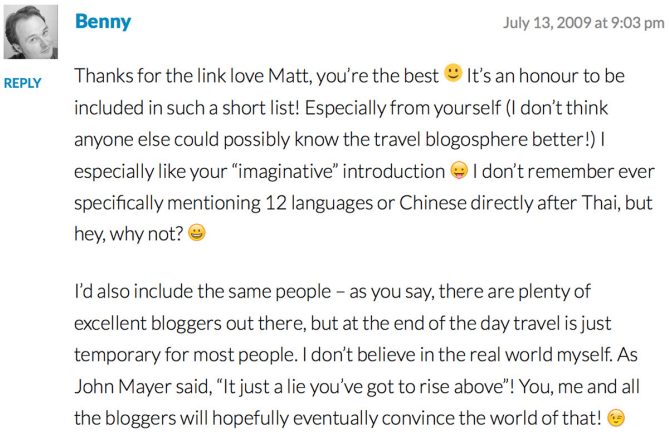


Image 5: Link love

[123] See for instance http://www.nomadicmatt.com/travel-blogs/perpetual-nomads-you-should-read/, http://www.nomadicmatt.com/travel-blogs/favorite-blogs-2013/, http://www.nomadicmatt.com/travel-blogs/best-blogs-of-2015/

[124] ibid.; cf. http://www.seomark.co.uk/high-quality-backlinks/

Throughout the blog, we see these other 'team members' occasionally check in and comment upon a blog post, feature in a guest post or interview, or appear in a list of Matt's favorite travel blogs. In Goffman's (1959) notion of team, there is a reciprocal dependence between its members. Their co-operation forces a certain 'familiarity' amongst each other – "a kind of intimacy without warmth" (Goffman 1959: 82-83). In the blog, the term 'link love,' of course, may serve as a first example of this. However, as Goffman also notes, any member of the team can disrupt the team effort through inappropriate conduct or 'destructive information' (ibid.: 141). An example of this can be found in a blog post where Nomadic Matt explains using an editor to improve the quality of his writing. A comment is made by co-blogger Robert Schrader who, considering himself 'a writer first and a travel blogger second', notes: "I never thought the quality of writing on your site was abysmal, just average." Schrader does concede, however, that Kepnes' blog is still much better than "many other popular travel blogs" (see Image 6).[125]

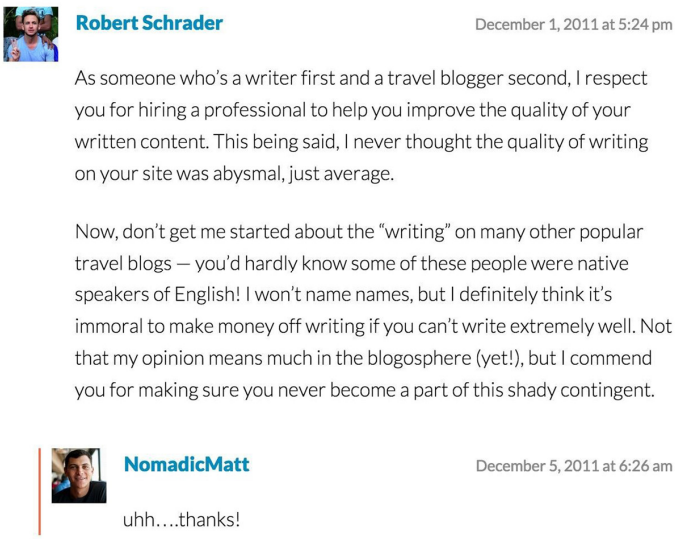


Image 6. Team feedback

Here, we see a twofold disruption of the role of the expert. Nomadic Matt first acknowledges his lack of competence in what could be seen as an essential skill for anyone in the role of a professional travel blogger, i.e. writing. Schrader, who is a popular blogger himself (running the blog *leaveyourdailyhell.com*), might also be considered a supposed member of the team – and his comment as a form of in-appropriate conduct in team performance, a breakdown of the reciprocal de-pendence between travel bloggers, and a disruption of Nomadic Matt's construction

[125] http://www.nomadicmatt.com/travel-blogs/how-i-make-money-and-afford-to-travel/

of expertise. On the other hand, we might see Schrader's attention to his team member as a reestablishment of the latter as someone who is deemed worthy to be commented upon in the first place. In fact, we can understand this interaction as individual members operating under different conceptions of the Goffmanian 'definition of the situation'; specifically, the definition of the 'professional travel blogger' team. More than simply a backhanded compliment, Schrader's comment proceeds to deride other travel bloggers in order to generate some goodwill and equivalence between these two bloggers.

It could be argued that one of the contexts in which the bloggers operate has to do with the technical affordances and metrics of popularity in digital culture; the means with which popularity and visibility can be achieved (cf. 'link love' above) can encourage the bloggers to act as a collaborative team. On the other hand, these 'team members' are also competitors to each other in generating traffic to monetize their travel advice, in which context poisonous comments regarding another blogger's expertise or eloquence may not be all that surprising. This also helps to explain Nomadic Matt's hesitant and somewhat disparaging "uhh....thanks!" to Schrader's comment, not engaging in any further discussion; a specific definition of the situation has not been adhered to. The lack of clarity in the definition of the situation here can also be seen as inflected by the issue of translocality[126], an aspect troubling all kinds of established notions in sociolinguistics, such as the traditional sense of 'speech community', as a group of people tied together by clear and generally shareable rules of the indexical value and function of signs (Silverstein 2003; Agha 2007). The kinds of 'groupness' emerging online do not require temporal and spatial co-presence, nor do they seem to require in all cases strong and lasting bonds grounded in shared bodies of knowledge (cf. Varis and Blommaert 2015).

Audience feedback

If we turn, then, to the role of the general audience, we first need to note that this audience is couched in the algorithmic configuration of the blog. In discussing the notion of *orders of visibility*, we referred to the fact that hits and views (i.e. numbers) determine the popularity and visibility of something online. Similarly, Nomadic Matt's audience is not only an audience per se, but also a source of data. While visitors of Nomadic Matt's blog may have different participation statuses (Murthy 2012: 1067) – for instance, some of them might be silently 'hate-watching' its content – the fact is that their mere presence on the website becomes metrified.

[126] Following Hepp (2009), we understand 'translocality' as "(…) guid[ing] the focus from questions of locality (…), to questions of connectivity." (Theorizing Media Culture as Translocal section, para. 6), as today's translocal media cultures "(…) transgress the local without being necessarily focused on territoriality as a reference point of their meaning articulation." (ibid., para. 7)

Through web services such as Google Analytics, bloggers can meticulously trace the web traffic on their sites, in order to turn customer information into actionable data.[127] The audience thus becomes involved in the blog's SEO-targeted configuration – and thus, part of the overall structure of the blog, visible for instance in the reader-generated top 6 'Most popular travel tips,' based on what others have deemed most relevant to view. We might understand this algorithmic ordering of information as a computational type of 'hyper-ritualization,' in that it "anticipates and is already adapted to the variety of readings it will be subject to" (Ytreberg 2002: 486). Interestingly, content-wise these most popular posts include those that either strongly posit the author as travel expert or life coach. For instance, 'Picking a travel credit card' is a very practical post on how to go about issues related to money while traveling, whereas 'Why travel makes you awesome'[128] refers to a 'traveler identity', and more broadly, ideal forms of personhood and lifestyle (cf. Leppänen 2015). In the post, the blogger, describing his personal development as a result of his travels, writes: "Simply put, I'm a lot more awesome now than I used to be." This seems to indicate that readers do not come to Nomadic Matt's blog simply to receive practical travel tips, but also use it as a kind of identity resource.

The function of the website as identity resource is apparent in that it seems to invite its audience to engage in telling personal stories and anecdotes in the comment section. This can be quantified by comparing the most frequent words used by Nomadic Matt versus those by his commentators. While such a comparison between a single person's narratives and short posts by a diverse audience has limited purchase, we can immediately note some patterns that warrant further investigation. The word 'I', for instance, appears to be the most distinct word for the comment section as a whole – that is, the 'keyness' (Scott 1997; Biber, Connor and Upton 2007) of the word, in terms of log-likelihood, is the highest one within the comment subcorpus (see Image 7). This is partly commonsensical, as every commentator will be likely to use the first-person singular form (after all, a comment is an expression of a personal reaction or attitude). Looking at the linguistic context of the word, it becomes clear that commentators talk about their own experiences, comparable to those recounted in the post they are responding to.

If we look at the 'keyness' of other words appearing in the comments vis-à-vis the blog, we see that 'thanks' (thanks for sharing, thanks for this), 'agree' (agree with you, agree with this[129]) and 'great' (great post, great article, great tip) take top spots (see Image 7).

[127] See also http://www.google.com/analytics/

[128] http://www.nomadicmatt.com/travel-blogs/why-travel-makes-you-awesome/.

[129] Inversions have been taken into account but are negligible. Out of a total of 2,163 instances of 'agree,' for instance, only 32 are composed of the bigram 'don't agree.'

Rank	Freq	Keyness (LL)	Keyword
1	69615	3092.705	i
2	4814	2183.471	matt
3	3552	2026.714	thanks
4	4069	1168.215	am
5	1961	1148.716	agree
6	3269	1026.959	post
7	6759	987.610	great

Image 7. 'Keyness' of words used by commentators[130]

This indicates that another dominant function of the comment section is reinforcing the blogger's position as an expert, as the majority of the commentators acknowledge the usefulness of the tips, and more broadly reinforce the kind of identity that the blogger puts forward. The same can be seen on the forums on the website, especially in its 'Introductions' thread where hundreds of users present themselves and their plans of becoming (often a perpetual) traveler.

At the same time, this does not mean there is no heterogeneity in the uptake of the blog. The views and comments can cover all kinds of responses to the content, especially when it comes to a massively popular blogger such as Nomadic Matt, writing in the 'global' English language. As large numbers of 'self-interpellated' (Lange 2009) readers – individuals considering themselves as belonging to the intended audience – flock to the blog, the uptake thus potentially becomes *fractal*, as a number of different contextualization universes (Blommaert 2005: 44) are mobilized in the framing of the content[131]. This heterogeneity means that Matt's expertise is both reinforced and contested: it is not always the 'ideal reader' who responds to the posts. This becomes visible for instance in the blog post 'Everyone says I'm running away' mentioned above, in which Nomadic Matt responds to those criticizing his nomadic lifestyle as escapist and criticizes the '9 to 5' life, arguing for travel as a lifestyle choice. Referencing the (imagined) team of perpetual travelers to which he belongs, the blogger states:

We have a degree of freedom a lot of people will never experience. We get to be the captains of our ships. But it is a freedom we chose to have. We looked around and said, "*I want something different*" (emphasis original).

[130] LL refers to the log-likelihood ratio, which expresses how many times more likely the data are under the null model (i.e. the comment subcorpus) than the other (i.e. Nomadic Matt's corpus). Model created using AntConc (Anthony 2014).

[131] Blommaert (2005: 44) defines 'contextualization universes' as "(…) complexes of linguistic, cognitive, social, cultural, institutional, etc. skills and knowledge which [people] use for contextualising statements, and interaction involves the meeting of such universes." The 'fractality' of uptake, or the potential heterogeneity in contextualization universes, is at least partly caused by the translocality we referred to above.

In the comment section, a user named 'Dave and Deb' – in all likelihood the authors of *The Planet D*, another very popular professional travel blog – respond (Image 8):

Dave and Deb October 19, 2009 at 1:40 pm

Well said. I agree, traveling is living, not running away.
Oh, how many times we have been judged for what we have chosen to do and how quickly people voice their opinion.

Image 8. Dave and Deb reinforcing Nomadic Matt's message

These teammates show up in order to reaffirm the point made in the post: that 'society' is a normalizing entity that decides upon what constitutes an acceptable lifestyle and what does not. The 'definition of the situation' fostered by the team is one of rebelliousness and 'thinking outside the box', which themselves of course are principles firmly entrenched in the moral system of the privileged Western working classes (Du Gay et al. 1997; Brooks 2000). The shared definition is also picked up by a user named 'Ali' (Image 9), who responds by commenting:

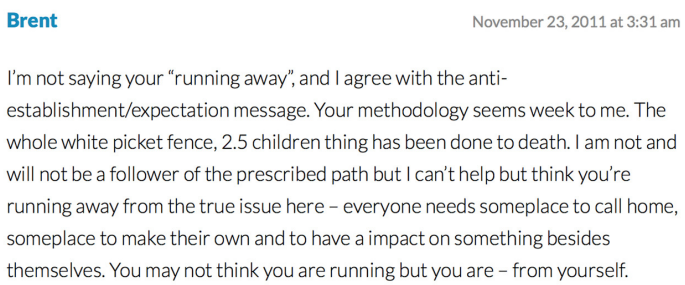
Ali May 31, 2010 at 1:18 am

Matt, probably not much else to say that hasn't already been said, but this article is amazing. Travelers, vagabonds, nomads, backpackers, wanderers… Whatever we call ourselves (or someday hope to call ourselves) it's all the same. This is the lifestyle your readers either already have or dream of having. Reading this gets me excited and awakens a part of me that lays dormant while I'm chained to my office, waiting for my next opportunity to hop on a plane and explore another corner of the world. The people who think you're running away are just jealous because you've found a way to live your life in a more exciting way that allows for more "you" time instead of doing what someone else wants you to do. I think that's what most of us want, we just have to find our own way to do it. I envy your lifestyle and over the past year, since I've realized that this is what I want for my life, I've decided to search for a way to travel more permanently as well. Reading things like this helps keep me motivated to push myself until I get there. Thanks for being an inspiration to all of us nomads and nomad-wannabes out there!

Image 9. Ali reinforcing Nomadic Matt's message

By asserting that Nomadic Matt's readers either perpetually travel or would want to acquire such a lifestyle, this audience member shows that the 'team' is as much an imaginary construct as it is a real group of people with similar interactional interests. This audience member does not present him/herself as a professional or famous

blogger – in fact, (s)he indicates being 'chained to my office' – yet (s)he plays a role in reinforcing the 'expert' status of Nomadic Matt, as well as discursively establishing coherence to the blog's social space. By stating that Nomadic Matt's choice of lifestyle is shared by his readers, the commentator invokes the idea of the blog as a 'filter bubble' (Pariser 2011) in which users are surrounded by others with similar 'profiles' (cf. Rainie and Wellman 2012). However, as mentioned, responses are heterogeneous, and the implicit impression of the team that the aforementioned user may have is disrupted by another comment in the same section. A user named Brent writes as follows (Image 10):


Brent November 23, 2011 at 3:31 am

I'm not saying your "running away", and I agree with the anti-establishment/expectation message. Your methodology seems week to me. The whole white picket fence, 2.5 children thing has been done to death. I am not and will not be a follower of the prescribed path but I can't help but think you're running away from the true issue here – everyone needs someplace to call home, someplace to make their own and to have a impact on something besides themselves. You may not think you are running but you are – from yourself.

Image 10: A disruptive voice

The user, while acknowledging the blogger's alternative vision on what a fulfilling life amounts to, points out that the blogger's self-centered lifestyle of gathering impressions and experiences foregoes the responsibilities and inherent values of civic life. The blog, in other words, remains a space in which different voices coincide – even though Nomadic Matt himself may legitimize and support certain (non-disruptive) voices instead of others, for instance by commenting back upon Ali's positive response with "You're very welcome!"

The complex role of audience members as team members also becomes apparent in several other blog entries. Nomadic Matt has written several posts about an annual reader survey he performs on his blog, responding to comments and complaints by his audience. He also employs his audience for financial support, having funded a travel app through the crowdsourcing app Kickstarter.[132] And the blogger has recently started the 'NM Case Study Project' in which he helps some of his readers with a savings plan – acting in the role of financial advisor in order "to highlight that people of varying incomes, ages, backgrounds, and nationalities can travel."[133] What this shows is how audience members can in all sorts of ways directly influence the types of activities being undertaken by the blogger-celebrities they follow, and these bloggers may respond directly to them, being more intimately connected to their public than any classical celebrity figure. Altogether, a

[132] https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/572663770/tripsaver-the-ultimate-travel-budgeting-app
[133] http://www.nomadicmatt.com/travel-blogs/case-study-project/

'blog reader,' thus, can in fact simultaneously or alternately play a role as an audience member, and performer in a team (cf. Goffman 1959).

Conclusion

In this paper, we have examined the identity performance of Nomadic Matt as a travel expert and life coach. Instead of conceptualizing it as a solipsistic, individual performance or achievement by the blogger, we have seen that the construction of expertise is a 'team effort' in which other bloggers, as well as the broader audience of the blog, play a multitude of different roles – sometimes functioning as team members, through specific types of uptake of Nomadic Matt's posts, and sometimes as 'eavesdroppers,' leaving no visible traces of themselves. However, the invisible readers, too, are 'present' in the sense that they contribute to the visibility of the blog and the construction of expertise by generating user data. As a stochastic and fractal social environment in which the Goffmanian team plays a central role, the blog functions in a completely different way from the glossy travel guides and magazines that its visual style resembles so strongly. The construction of expertise arises from the types of interaction and reinforcement that are built in into the blogging format.

If we trace the trajectory of the blog from its first iteration in 2008 to its current form, we see that it has shifted in function: with certain types of expertise constructed for *Nomadic Matt* over several years, the blog now might be called a *recursive routine*: it functions as a testimony, showing the blogger as a 'made man' in the intricacies and secrets of global and perpetual travel. The diary-format of the blog has, then, itself become a testimony to his past, contributing to the expert role constructed for the blogger. Here we might recall Goffman's remark on advertisements: "their deepest significance is that they provide a mock-up of everyday life, a put-together script of unscripted social doings" (1986: 53). This turns out to be an apt description for the trajectory of this blog, which in its procedural and discursive construction, and its reinforcement by others, generates an enfranchised life narrative as much as it recounts it.

The notion of 'team,' again, proves useful in capturing processes of enregisterment: as we have seen in this chapter, given the translocal interactional affordances of online environments such as blogs, and the algorithmic generation of popularity and visibility online, the construction of expertise – or the enregisterment of any type of discourse – should be conceptualized in terms of a 'team effort'. This implies the development of expertise through teamwork, but also producing identifiable discourse for potential team members – becoming 'teamable', so to say, through specific content-based and organizational choices, as we have seen with the mixture of recognizable visual and textual elements in the *Nomadic Matt* blog.

The existence and importance of this kind of collaborative work may also serve to disrupt the (perceived) radical fluidity of blogging, in fact a practice that can provide revenues and fame only through perpetual scripted activity, and in which one might be replaced by another life-maximizing 'entrepreneur of the self' from one day to the next. In the field of tourism studies, while Goffman's work has thus far been applied in discussions on authenticity (in terms of 'frontstage' and 'backstage'), the 'team' approach seems to yield fruitful material for discussion as regards the production and enregisterment of authoritative, 'canonic' travel discourse in the digital age where travel blogs arguably play a very significant role. Additionally, we have preliminarily showed how in terms of Goffmanian 'roles', an established expert role such as a 'travel blogger' is in actual fact a 'dance of identification' (Goffman 1961: 144), with life coaching as an important discursive component, contributing to the visibility as a travel blogger. Thus, we suggest that further application of Goffman's concepts of 'role' and 'team' might prove useful in future study of (dis)identifications online.

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3.3 *Interlude: A distant reading of professional travel blogs*

The current section on travel blogs has involved two papers that bookend the four-year research project they are a product of. The first paper on professional travel blogs was written three years ago, the first to have been published; the second, a collaborative effort, zoomed in on one of the cases in the first paper, and was only recently finished. Within the scope of these two papers, there already is a movement visible in terms of epistemology, ontology, and axiology. This development is characterized by a shifting focus towards digital humanities methods, and the oscillation between distant and close reading, in order to understand the stochastic forms of online travel writing. *Here I am: Authenticity and self-branding on travel blogs* offered a first inquiry into travel bloggers: the About-pages of the blogs were subjected to a qualitative discourse analysis, which focused on interrelated forms of identity construction, authenticity, and branding. This inquiry was a bottom-up or data-driven process, where themes that emerged while reading were categorized and theoretically contextualized. The data was predominantly formed by the 'first impressions' that are created on a blog's About-page.

In *There is no 'I' in 'team': The co-construction of expertise on the Nomadic Matt travel blog*, one specific blog was selected, and then read through the theoretical lens of symbolic interactionism. This theoretical precision characterizes the later stage of a PhD project, and the methods adopted here involve digital tools and strategies that were developed in the course of the PhD project. Discursive patterns on the blog were exposed by a quantitative categorization of blog titles, the amount of 'teamwork' in the blog's discourse was indexed by looking at the amount of posts that were co-authored, and so on. Several other digital approaches were adopted in order to answer to the question if the Goffmanian notion of the team can help in explaining what it is bloggers do in order to self-brand as experts. This progression towards digital methods is indicative for the PhD project as a whole, which as it progressed started drawing types of analysis into orbit that allow for a specific and arguably more distinct kind of discourse analysis. It is a kind that more closely looks at the procedural and programmatological nature of an online ecology. As such, we may add a few insights about the procedural nature of the travel blogs that we have indexed in this section's first paper. This also helps to explain the concept of travel scripting that was put forward in the introduction.

To reiterate: we are dealing with the aleatory and multisemiotic blog format, allowing for specific organizational patterns and discursive strategies. This constitutes our first context of travel scripts. First, scripted rules are followed in terms of straightforward content segmentation and layout. All blogs incorporate a header image on the front page, typically involving a tagline describing the blog's focus (such as 'Food is the reason you should travel' [*Migrationology*], 'Adventure is for Everyone!' [*The Planet D*], or 'Design your tomorrow' [*Wandering Trader*]). About half of the blogs' landing pages shows the blogroll itself, with the latest post on top. Some bloggers open with a profile

picture, drawing all attention of first-time visitors to their face as a brand (*Everything Everywhere*, *Migrationology, The Planet D, Uncornered Market*). And the vast majority of the bloggers offers a picturesque header image with what we might call a canonical or, in the wake of Barthes, mythical travel moment or sight. One such moment involves the blogger treading into a bright blue ocean – where the details of the implied movement are key to understanding the blogger's identity offering. She is either 'running enthusiastically' (*Y Travel*) or 'treading slowly and consciously' (*Leave Your Daily Hell*).[134] Another moment is the 'picture-perfect' landscape, highly reminiscent of travel postcards, magazines and brochures: for instance, a quiet lake carrying wooden boats (*Nomadic Matt*, *A Little Adrift*), or indigenous people walking along a road (*Wild Junket*). While many blogs are, in terms of their content, clearly geared toward a specific market niche, their visual style makes use of some thoroughly engrained formats.

A further aspect to take note of is the type of content management system (CMS) that the professional travel blogs operate on. Expectedly, the vast majority turns out to run on well-known and oft-used CMSs, with WordPress as the clear system of choice. WordPress is widely known as the most popular CMS for blogging and arguably the most-used CMS in general.[135] The choice for this open-source CMS can be explained by the ease of use that it affords – the non-technical user may simply log into a visual interface or 'dashboard' in order to add posts, pages or categories. Users also have access to thousands of easily configurable plugins that add functionality to their WordPress-hosted website (such as social media APIs, rotating headers and banners, contact form and newsletter functionality, CAPTCHA, Google Analytics and so on). Some bloggers provide a link to the CMS or the theme[136] they use on their front end; yet the large majority of the blogs hide such links, so that only looking at the source HTML of the blogs reveals that their blogs are built on WordPress. The use of full-fledged management systems implies that website owners no longer need to build their own website from computer language frameworks (or employ an expensive IT-expert to create it): users can 'simply write content'. While this offloading of base *linguistic* tasks has been often filed under the 'democratization' of the web, we might also recognize that the divide between the 'superuser' with knowledge about the web's code and the standard user[137], despite recent efforts such as the "Learn to code" movement, remains intact.

The more important point to take away from this may be that, if one is not required to understand the formal language syntax to interact in online environments,

[134] A telling case of minute semiotic differences acquiring 'the status of fundamental aspects of being'– a form of culture as accent (Blommaert and Varis 2012).

[135] See for instance http://w3techs.com/technologies/details/cm-wordpress/all/all. All online sources were accessed June 5, 2016.

[136] A WordPress theme is a fixed layout module composed of HTML, CSS and PHP that can be installed to one's WordPress website.

[137] These permission settings terms are often used in a context of operating systems. A superuser or root user has all rights and permissions on the system.

one may more unwittingly accommodate the heteromated systems that typify these online contexts. For the user, simply logging in, or adding a comment, or entering one's user details has imperceptible implications for the form of and content on the blog and the ways in which one, as a customer, is approached, and these implications are often beyond one's immediate understanding. And bloggers, as non-technical experts working on their blogging system, are also implicated in systems of hetero-mation that they may unwittingly contribute to. Their blogs are written in compliance to the ever-changing rules of Search Engine Optimization, for instance, and the precise ways in which their content thus gets found and leveraged by Google's crawling and parsing algorithms is not so clear. In broader terms, scripted environments do not necessarily (and perhaps not likely) involve technical experts, but rather everyday online users who leverage the ease of computational frameworks to build or access a blog. This lack of technical knowledge in a highly technical environment may contribute to the unchecked proliferation of heteromated algorithmic systems.

Frequent word analysis

A further extension of the argument in this section's first paper may be warranted, in which we take a distant look at the whole corpus of travel blogs as we have established it. We can briefly zoom out to see what the content of the entire corpus of blogs looks like, and how that corpus answers to the discursive patterns of authenticity and identity that was established on the blogs' 'About' pages. Scraping all the entries in our list of travel blogs as we defined it in Section 3.1 yields a corpus with 21,571,045 words in total. Going through these blogs separately may be more confounding than it is revealing, and the question becomes how to distill prevalent topics from the corpus, and come to a macro-hermeneutics of professional travel blogs.

The first, simple answer to that question is by tracing and reviewing most-frequent words. We will focus on the transformed lemmas of the corpus to get a more succinct image of the most salient words in the corpus.[138] The most-frequent word list includes a number of interesting words, from which some tentative patterns arise. Different part-of-speech filters were tried out when generating this word list: we can respond affirmatively to Matthew Jockers' suggestion that nouns seem best fit to capture thematic trends in a corpus (2013). It should be added that some prepositions, adverbs and adjectives do usually assist in framing those nouns. The list of top

[138] These transformations and analyses were performed with Corporeal; see https://github.com/tomvannuenen/corporeal.

lemmatized top words, if we remove stop words, manually prune the list[139] and categorize its contents, looks as follows:

Time		Space		Attribute	
time:	59,580	place:	35,39	one:	76,237
year:	35,941	city:	36,335	like:	54,405
day:	52,942	world:	35,475	people:	37,986
new:	42,267	around:	33,178		

Figure 1. Top nouns (lemmas) and associated frequencies

We can place the most-frequent and salient lemmas in the corpus in the categories of time and space. These words index topics such as the time that travelers are spending abroad, how they experience the passing of time while abroad, what kinds of places they are visiting, and how these places are valued. The 'attribute' category, further, includes more general recurrent features that are present in the blogging discourse, which as we will see are indicative of normative attitudes towards place and time.

We can then proceed in a few ways to inquire into what these words actually mean in context. For the sake of brevity we will only inquire into their most dominant usage. The first step, then, can be to find the most-frequent word clusters they belong to, and look at the distribution of these frequent n-grams. Zooming out yet a bit further, we can then look at the concordances of these words – the context in which they arise. When going through the corpus, we can randomly select blog entries from our corpus in which these relevant concordances arise. What this yields is an interpretative framework that does not favor the narrative of any blogs or bloggers but primarily considers the discourse belonging to certain keywords.

For instance, let us start by considering the two nouns pertaining to the temporal dimension. The first of these is 'time'. What kind of time? The most-frequent 3-word cluster of the word turns out to be 'the first time': when contextualized, this points to first experiences of the blogger (e.g. 'It was the first time I had ever seen a live fire dance...'). We already noted that in the blog's About-pages that many professional bloggers share a focus on convincing their audience of a certain type of freedom, away from the routines and activities of everyday life. The occurrence of first time experiences is in this light unsurprising, and indicates that this freedom is performed through novel experiences within the niche that the travel blogger performs in. However, we also have the word 'year', which acts quite differently. Its two most significant clusters are 'of the year' and 'time of year': for instance, one blogger notes

[139] What this means is that all of the most-frequent words in this list must be investigated, but that not all of them will be found analytically useful. In the categorization as it has been made, those words (such as 'get', 'new' and 'us') have not been taken into account, as their contexts turned out not to be analytically interesting. 'Us', for instance, did not refer to an inclusive 'us' but to the U.S., indicative of the number of bloggers hailing from that region.

how “this is also a good time of year for viewing reptiles.” It appears that, differently from ‘time’, year does not so much refer to the novelty of experience but to the to-be-expected scenarios in a certain period within the year. Looking at ‘day’, then, we see a similar usage: its most-frequent trigram is ‘of the day’. The frequency of this word cluster can be attributed to one blog, *Wanderlust and Lipstick*, which features a ‘photo of the day’. While this may seem insignificant in and of itself, if we contextualize this use of time with the previous word, we find that temporality acts both as an indicator for repetition and predictability. This helps uncover the paradoxical relation to time that we have already discerned in the blogger discourse in the last article: for all the emphases on new experiences and wayward exploration, bloggers have to provide their audiences with symbols of stability and entrepreneurial trustworthiness – from daily pictures to notions of stability about the places their audience might visit (next year it will be the same as, or at least comparable to, this year).

Next is the spatial dimension. We note three words here, and will contextualize them in roughly ascending order of size. First, we have ‘place’ – an archetypical denominator for the tourism discourse. Looking at the kinds of formulations about place, we see that the word is used most often in relation to the logic of opportunity that we have established earlier. That is, place most often occurs in a mode of recommendation that travel bloggers engage in: the two most-frequent word clusters in which the word appears in the corpus are ‘a great place’ and ‘a place to’. In this context, McCabe and Stokoe have discussed “the interactional processes of the articulation of identities and how these are intricately linked to the formulation of places” (2004: 617). Indeed, talk of place fosters identity work: when bloggers speak of ‘a great place’ or ‘a place to’, they emphasize types of behavior that befit the role they carve out for themselves as travel bloggers – *Luxury Traveler* talks about amenities ‘making the Evian royal resort a great place for a family holiday’ while the *Traveling Mamas* write about ‘a great place for kids to break the ice.’ Beyond this, most bloggers apply the keyword for a generic language of recommendation: ‘a place to eat dinner’, ‘a place to sleep’, ‘a place to party’ and so on.

The keyword ‘city’ is, statistically speaking, the dominant expression and manifestation of place within the travel blogger discourse. Looking again at clusters we find that the city occurs most dominantly in a possessive structure – ‘of the city’ (e.g. ‘heart of the city’, ‘part of the city’, ‘edge of the city’, etc.) – and in a prepositional clause such as ‘in the city’ (e.g. ‘discoveries in the city’, ‘attractions in the city’). The city, here, is the dominant type of place that is visited; its emphasis vis-à-vis words such as ‘country’, ‘nation’, or ‘village’ already indicates a predisposition of the travel blogging community under scrutiny here toward the urban environment.

The third spatial index is ‘world’, which, like city, appears surrounded by pre-positions. Most salient are the clusters ‘in the world’ and ‘around the world’ – the word ‘around’ itself appears in the top list too. Especially the latter combination seems to indicate a type of cosmopolitanism: the word draws into orbit types of things that appear globally, such as ‘people around the world’ or ‘cultures around the world’.

While this way of phrasing does imply a cosmopolitan diversity (there surely are all kinds of cultures around the world), it also indicates an equation of these differences: that which can be found throughout the world is never specific or unique. In fact, this 3-word cluster brings us to understand the many different ways in which travel bloggers partake in a language of similarity and comparison. We may then note that the word 'like', in our attribute category, occurs notably often as well, being the 46th most-used word in the corpus. Its comparative modality (that is, its usage as a proposition, conjunction or adjective) appears 50,417 times in total, which is more than 10 times as often as its usage as a noun or verb (4,517 times in total). The same pattern can be distinguished when regarding the other attributive word, 'one'. When contextualized, we see it appears most frequently as a pronoun, in the trigram 'one of the' (19,513 times in total). It almost exclusively details positive attributes: 'one of the' might point to one of the blogger's favorite places, one of the most famous sites, one of the best restaurants in town, etc. It is, then, not a mark of singularity but of comparison; it describes *one of several*.

And finally, 'people'. The word is typical insofar as it indicates a lack of specificity about those encountered or referred to while bloggers are traveling. The lemma's most frequent 3-word cluster is 'people in the'. That is, people encountered on the trip: in the room, in the street, the park, the restaurant, and so on. Tourism is, as always, a business of large quantities, of many faces, of the crowd.

Suggestion for further research: Topic modeling

Another popular way within corpus linguistics of engaging with large quantities of data, and to construct a framework of salient and characteristic words or phrases, is through topic modeling, which we have introduced in Section 2.1. For our purposes, a topic model was created containing 50 topics, which can be visualized by looking at the appearance of certain topics throughout the corpus. A small sanity check may be in order to see if the program actually produces reliable topics. Topic 27, for instance, which contains keywords like 'kids', 'family', and 'disney', is shown to point to an unsurprising type of blog (see Figure 2).

The four spikes in this corpus are related to the blogs *Delicious Baby*, *Have Baby Will Travel*, *Traveling Mama's*, and *Wanderlust and Lipstick* – all of them specifically targeted at travel with children.

More interesting is the following topic, which as it turns out contains a number of words that we recognize from the top lemmas (see Figure 3). The topic includes predominantly affective words (good, love, pretty, bad, feel) that appear seldom in any of the other 49 topics in our current topic model. It also includes a few words that also appear in other topics (words that, in other words, are not quite representative for this topic as the affective words) such as 'make', 'people', 'time' and 'thing'.

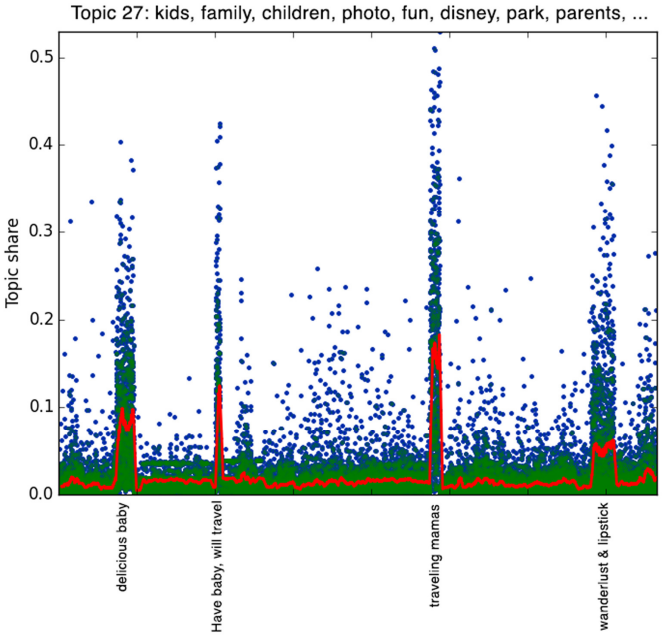

Figure 2. Topic modeling – sanity check

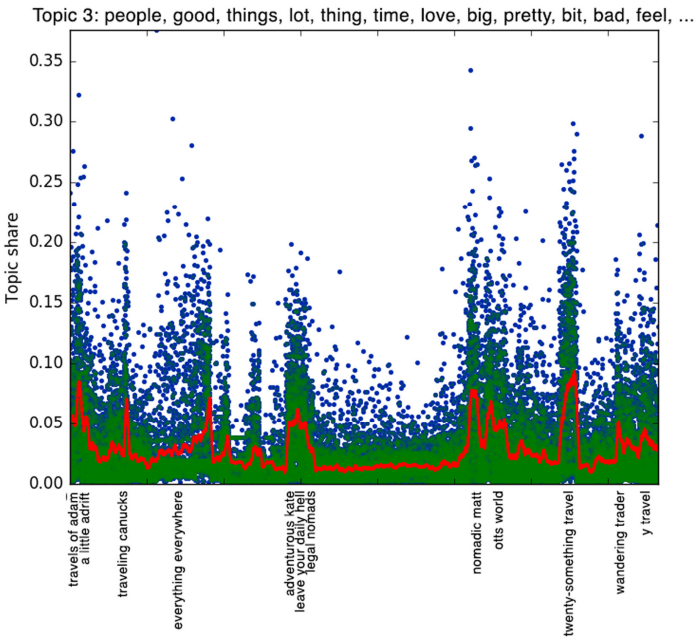

Figure 3. Topic model

We see that certain bloggers seem especially prone to using this kind of affective language. While a close reading of this topic is outside the scope of this research, this exercise shows how topic modeling may assist in tracing discursive patterns in multiple subcorpora: one may for instance take an interest in the divergence of these markers of affect, as they might not be a function of personal voice alone, but could also be related to the coverage of specific places or topics.

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CHAPTER 4

Platforms

4.1 Inside out: The production of locality on peer-to-peer platforms

Tom van Nuenen (2016). Inside out: The production of locality on peer-to-peer platforms. *Cogent Social Sciences* 2(1). doi: 10.1080/23311886.2016.1215780

Introduction

Querying Google, Bing or Yahoo for pictures with the search words 'tourist' and 'traveler', one can find the following images leading the search results (see Figure 1).

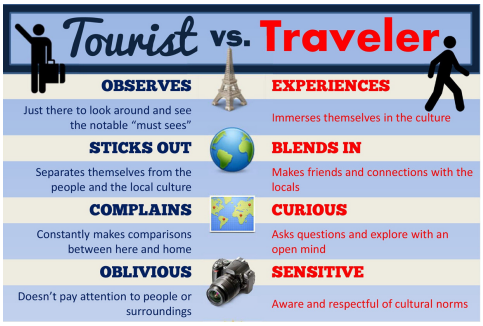

Figure 1. Tourists and travelers
(retrieved from http://www.google.com/search?q=tourist+traveler)

The normative difference we encounter here is a familiar one: the traveler is construed as a sensitive and curious creature, better attuned to the experiences and unexpected happenstances that a voyage offers. The sheer popularity and dominance of these images indicates a long-standing attitude within the social structure of tourism that we can call *anti-touristic*. This concept denotes an aversion to the superficial experiences associated with traditional mass tourism, and the desire to be separated from the perceived commonalities of tourist crowds (McWha et al. 2015; see also Bruckner and Finkielkraut 1979; Fussell 1982; Pearce 1982; Fischer 1984; Porter 1991; Urbain 1991; Buzard 1993; Hennig 1997; Dann 1999, 2012; McCabe 2005; Week 2012). Individuals who consider themselves 'travelers'

tend to pursue forms of symbolic capital by taking an interest in local culture – particularly vis-à-vis their consumer culture contemporaries, the 'tourists' (Cohen 1988; Galani-Moufati 2000; Jacobsen 2000; cf. Hulme and Youngs 2002: 7; O'Reilly 2005: 155-157). The popularity of anti-tourist attitudes arises amidst the marred social relationships of modern tourism, characterized by the tall tales, photoshopped images and idealized scenarios of tourism companies, as well as the many staged back-regions of modern tourism that foster a 'weakened sense of reality' (MacCannell 1999: 93), causing some concern among tourists about which encounters are 'authentic' (Kane 2012; Week 2012; McWha et al. 2015).

It is this anti-touristic concern for authenticity that is stressed, capitalized on, and accommodated for on web platforms[140] – both those run by tourism operators such as *Viator* (viator.com), and in a peer-to-peer capacity, with platforms such as *Vayable* (vayable.com) and *Spotted by Locals* (spottedbylocals.com). These platforms provide a form of hosting and guesting characteristic of what Jennie Germann Molz calls 'network hospitality' (2014): a system of advertisements, recommendations, and instructions about trips, which are provided to the platform's users ('travelers' in the ideological sense) to help them avoid trodden paths and tourist traps. These online repositories of anecdotal stories and (or *as*) advertisements often appear in the context of the sharing economy, specifically as peer-to-peer (P2P) systems, enabling consumers to directly barter products and services.

Such systems have had a significant impact on a number of long-established services and industries. Within the tourism sector, observers have noted a sizeable shift in consumer behavior due to these P2P services (see also Guttentag 2013; Molz 2014). For instance, in 2013, users on *Airbnb* contributed 185 million euros in economic activity in Paris (Airbnb 2013). These socio-economic changes in distributed, online environments are often accompanied by expressions of value that hail from the 1970's ideologies of computers as harbingers of liberation and democratization, 'peer-to-peer adhocracy' and 'expressions of the true self' (Turner 2006: 3). Further, the 'P2P-movement', as it is sometimes called, is referred to in light of its power to subvert the position of dominant corporations and brands.

This discursive function of P2P systems connects rather easily to the anti-touristic ideology of the 'traveler'. P2P travel platforms therefore typically market themselves as the ideological counterpart of the corroded tourist system (see for example Financial Times 2014; Swischer 2014; Fast Company 2015). Consuming a place, under this logic, allows one to forego familiar institutional roads (travel agencies, hotel chains, certified guides), and engage in allegedly direct, unmediated contact with insiders or locals. The key concept with which P2P-like platforms are associated is 'disruptive innovation' (see also Christensen and Raynor 2003;

[140] It is productive, here, to think in terms of the 'platform' instead of the 'website' (see for instance Gillespie [2010] and Helmond [2015]). This means to epitomise the 'multi-sided' nature of these online environments: users, contractors, and third-party developers are interconnected, and the value of the platform increases the more it is used by all of these parties (Hagiu 2014).

Guttentag 2013) – that is, these services disrupt the regular affairs of tertiary industries through user-friendliness and cost-effectiveness, their benefits falling upon the end-user (see also Law 2009; Law, Leung and Wong 2004; Lawton and Weaver 2009; Mayr and Zins 2009).[141] This article provides a computational keyword analysis in order to engage with text and imagery on abovementioned platforms. It focuses on the discursive 'production of locality' and its main question is by which discursive means the notion of the insider or local, as a commodified identity type and an ideological signifier for anti-tourism authenticity, is constructed.

Anti-tourism and translocality

Anti-tourism can be traced back to the popularization of Rome as a touristic destination in the 18th century. The Romantics, such as William Wordsworth and George Gordon Byron, started explicitly disassociating themselves from these masses and the ordinary forms of experience they felt were accompanying it. The first line of Wordsworth's *The Brothers* – 'These Tourists, Heaven preserve us!' – is indicative of this sentiment. Byron, in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, offers an alternative to the tourist experience: the perceptive and politically sensitive Byronic hero who says farewell to house, home, and heritage to travel through Europe on his own, sensitive to the political climate and particularities of the places he visits. Authors such as Charles Dickens, Henry James and Edward Morgan Forster would draw similar distinctions (Buzard 1993; Fussel 1987), and tourists would go on to be portrayed with colorful metaphors from the animal kingdom – one can think of herds, swarms, or droves (Culler 1990: 153). Since the popularization of mass tourism in the 1950s, the attitudes of distinction with other tourists seems to constitute an integral part of the structure of tourism, instead of taking place 'outside' of it. Tourism studies would come to take this debate some years later, in the 1960s (see for instance Aubert 1965 or Jacobsen 2000). Indeed, tourism has a self-effacing quality; the very 'language of tourism' is one of sentiments about distancing oneself from the other tourists (Dann 1999: 160; see also Culler 1990: 3). Likewise, the process of avoiding unsolicited happenstance that occurs on anti-touristic platforms is characteristic of and endemic to the logic of tourism. The commodification of tentatively authentic experiences, if we agree that authenticity is always partly a constructive and symbolic matter (Bruner 1994), is in other words a matter of ideology, and the question becomes how this ideology is articulated on the platforms offering it.

[141] Such a focus on subversion, however, means taking the for-profit providers of these new services themselves enjoying the fruits of their participatory networks out of the equation (see also Lanier 2013; Bauwens 2005).

In the context of peer-to-peer platforms, what is predominantly subverted is the impersonality of the relationships between tourists and locals. What is 'prosumed' instead we might see as an effect of that which Arjun Appadurai has called the 'production of locality'. With locality, Appadurai refers broadly to "a complex phenomenological quality, constituted by a series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity, and the relativity of contexts" (1996: 178). That is, locality is a context-dependent set of shared perceptions, values, beliefs and ideas that develops within certain historical genres. A classic example of a locality-producing genre, to Appadurai, is the 'industrial novel' of the 1840s, couched in a middle-class consciousness related to the development of industrial capitalism. By analogy, we might propose that the types of discourse we find on P2P services are part of the contemporary generational social structure of locality: what is bought and sold is primarily a matter of local knowledge. And as Appadurai indicates, much of what is considered 'local knowledge' is actually knowledge on "producing reliably local subjects as well as about producing reliably local neighborhoods within which such subjects can be recognized and organized" (1996: 181). Against the backdrop of late modernity, he asks the rhetorical question: "what is the nature of locality as a lived experience in a globalized, deterritorialized world?" (1996: 52), noting that locality loses its ontological status as the world becomes increasingly destabilized by flows of people (i.e. migration, tourism) and knowledge (i.e. the Internet).

More directly to the point of tourism, Appadurai notes that for a large part, "the logic of movement is provided by the leisure industries, which create tourist sites and locations around the world [...] [M]any such locations create complex conditions for the production and reproduction of locality [...] what we might call *translocalities*" (1996: 192). With translocality, Appadurai points towards a mobile situatedness of the individual that implies more than a state of transnationality: it is a mass-mediated decoupling of identity and territory in which experiences and social actions regarding taste, pleasure, and politics can unexpectedly converge and intersect. Such translocal phenomena are endemic to superdiverse societies (Vertovec 2007, 2012; Blommaert 2013), typified by a 'diversification of diversity' within which citizens may simultaneously be a part of several orders of indexicality, systems of meaning, or social relations. Looking back on our conception of anti-tourism, we see a peculiar tension arise. The ideology of anti-tourism, with its focus on the conscription to 'authentic' and 'local' identities instead of the globalized tourist identity, is paradoxically related to the global flows of information on peer-to-peer services and the concept of translocality. Moreover, as a translocal phenomenon, these peer-to-peer platforms are not so much 'mass-mediators' as they are representational repositories to be pulled instantaneously and on-demand by online individuals. The analysis of the platforms under discussion here will take this tension into account.

Analyzing insider discourses

This paper regards the platforms' home page, about page, and the listings themselves. The latter will be accessed by means of a computer-assisted content analysis, informed by a symbolic interactionist perspective – that is, it analyses online tourism as a product of everyday social interactions of individuals, and it regards language from a functional perspective, i.e. in terms of its social effects (Blommaert and Varis 2015: 6). By tracing straightforward quantitative elements such as word frequencies, keywords[142] in the text can be detected, and persistent discursive patterns on the platforms can be recognized that shape and influence the social structure of tourism that is prompted by these platforms.

Using macroanalytic strategies serves the purpose of temporarily de-emphasising individual occurrences of features or words, in favor of a focus on the larger system or corpus and its aggregate patterns and trends (Jockers 2013). The underlying assumption of this type of analysis is that it provides a framework to see, within individual texts, where certain words or features arise. Instead of gathering qualitative data for the modeling and statistical analyses of data to test hypotheses (Stepchenkova et al. 2004), computational models will be used to evoke an interpretative analysis (Ramsay 2011).

A methodological question to be answered first is how to find a selection of words that allows for a fair comparison between the platforms. The method adopted here is to focus on a number of large and popular cities that appear on all platforms. Data was collected from six different popular touristic cities in Europe: London, Paris, Istanbul, Barcelona, Amsterdam and Rome. Scraping all the advertisements within the scope of these cities yielded a *Viator* subcorpus (N=995,905 words),[143] a *Vayable* subcorpus (N=77,070 words) and a *Spotted by Locals* subcorpus (N=182,403 words). These platforms will be understood as different producers of locality. For the content analysis, the most notable words per subcorpus have been selected – that is, words that appear on the very top of their respective (relative) frequency lists.[144] To see how these words are distributed across their own sub-corpora, a graph of these words and their normalized[145] frequencies was drawn up, represented in a percentage-based stacked bar chart (see Figure 2).[146] The analysis pertains to these words, as well as their most-frequent word clusters.

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[142] This method of analysis goes back to Raymond Williams' *Keywords* (1983) and has recently been popularised by literary scholars such as Franco Moretti (e.g. 2013).

[143] Data of this website was gathered from the 'tours and activities' sections of the respective six cities.

[144] This is calculated with a tf-idf score: a statistical measure evaluating the importance a word has to a document that is part of an analytic corpus. A word's importance increases proportionally to the number of times it appears in the document, but is offset by the frequency of the word in the total corpus. This can be used for successful stopwords filtering.

[145] This is due to the difference in corpus size. Ratings have been normalised using Z-scores.

[146] Such a percentage-based bar chart significantly reduces the visually striking difference between subcorpora. This is not deemed problematic, however, since the current analysis uses these numbers only insofar as they give us general directions about the differences in word frequencies.

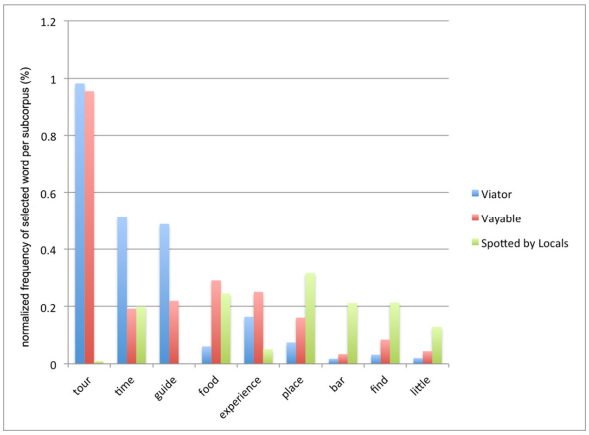

Figure 2. Comparative analysis[147]

Viator

Viator (viator.com) is a tourism operator, and a daughter organization of travel website company *TripAdvisor* since 2014. It is also decidedly the largest platform in our dataset. *Viator*'s About-page notes that the platform includes 'more than 3,000 affiliate sites that include major hotel chains and airlines, online travel agencies, city-specific sites and more' and features over 800,000 verified reviews, photos and videos (see http://www.viator.com/about/about-viator/viator-who-we-are[148]). *Viator* is not a peer-to-peer platform in a strict sense – it provides tourism advertisements in cooperation with local businesses, but does not offer any peer-to-peer freedom for its 'prosumers' to list tours and other experiences. Yet we may recognize that the framing of the platform is one of peer-to-peer adhocracy, highlighting the seemingly direct and unmitigated contact between clients and insiders. Regarding this platform allows us to see the strategic construction of the central concept in this paper, i.e. the insider.

On *Viator*, users can sign up for tours given by such insiders (which becomes apparent in the platform's tagline, 'travel with an insider'). We may immediately note that the word 'insider' itself, however, appears only 79 times in the subcorpus. Why this paucity? The cluster 'insider tips' emerges as the most frequent one: these tips refer to the contractor offering the tour (e.g. 'get insider tips from your guide'). On the 'About' page, too, *Viator* refers to these contractors as insiders: 'Our team of travel insiders is obsessed with finding the best things to do everywhere we travel.' This leads to the question who, or what, the insider refers to. If it would be

[147] The analysis was performed with a homebuilt text analysis tool in Python. See http://www.github.com/tomvannuenen/corporeal. Stopwords were removed when analyzing the results.
[148] All online sources were accessed 3 March 2016.

solely the local provider of a guided tour, we might say that this is far from a new phenomenon (think of the local cannibals guiding the runaway protagonists in Herman Melville's *Typee*, or the Oriental guides in E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*). The insider that is referred to, here, is constituted not only by the local guide, but also by the itinerant *Viator* employee who 'obsessively' picks these local guides and determines who is listed on their web platform. The insider, put differently, can signify both the local and translocal guide: the dominant function in both roles is to accurately locate and disperse valuable information about a place.

What is the nature of these forms of information? This becomes clearer when the most notable word in the subcorpus is traced: 'tour'. It turns out to be a signifier for the archetypical tourist-friendly kinds of offers that can be found on the platform – mostly 'walking tours', which is the most frequent cluster (1074 occurrences). In this context of archetypical tours, such as to the Vatican and Colosseum, recurring assets provided by the insider are 'skip-the-line' tickets (being mentioned 747 times in the *Viator* corpus alone), allowing tourists to avoid tourist queues for an additional fee. Since such tickets are usually available to any visiting tourist, the flexibility of the 'insider' as a concept starts to become clear. There does not seem to be anything 'local' about these local guides, save for their capacity of safeguarding minor time-sparing advantages for their clientele. Yet, despite offering mostly archetypical mass tourism activities and benefits, *Viator* does appropriate the language of anti-touristic sentiments in its slogans. On its front page, the header displays a series of testimonials from satisfied users (see Figure 3).

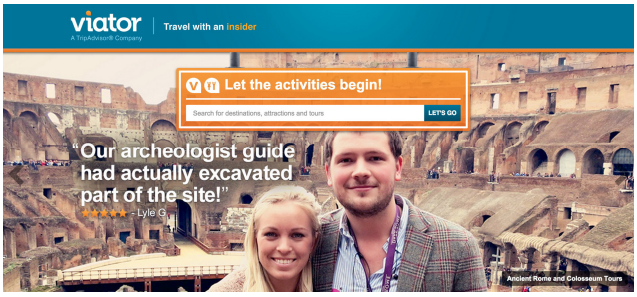

Figure 3. Viator front page (retrieved from http://www.viator.com)

The multisemiotic message to the website's visitor here involves imagery, text, and a star ranking. The picture shows a couple – presumably the local and the tourist – posing in front of Rome's Colosseum. Meanwhile, the apparent guide on the picture is lending himself to a personal, friendly photo with one of his customers. The accompanying central quote, a testimony from one of the platform's customers, implies a degree of unexpected pleasure: the insider of the trip turned out to be a local professional in his/her field, having been part of the site's excavation. Finally, there is a familiar marker of metrification, expressed by the 5-star rating. It offers a

sense of statistical objectivity (Irani 2015) to indicate the accuracy of the platform in matching the right insider with the right tourist. In fact, the platform goes to some lengths to signify the commodification – and measurability – of its insiders. The 'About Us' section of the website notes that the tourist does not have to do anything in order to create a valuable experience:

> We've done the homework, made all the connections, and even pulled a few strings to make sure our customers have unprecedented insider access provided by a global network of trustworthy and reliable local businesses.
> (See http://www.viator.com/about-us)

Viator, in other words, makes use of the rhetorical efficacy of the insider, which itself functions within the logic of anti-tourism. The platform's header image alone refers to the transient yet intense forms of intimacy that are often connected to the hypermobile social interactions of network hospitality (Bialski 2011, 2012; Germann Molz 2014). However, the platform's curators also employ thorough systems of quality control to determine who can rightfully nominate themselves with these terms. In fact, the role of these insiders seems to be to protect the customer against the uncomfortable or unpleasant surprises that are central to the traditional traveler experience (Jacobsen 2000: 288). The division between *Viator* and traditional 'offline' tourist organizations is, in this instance, hard to maintain, which underscores the strategic flexibility with which the concept of the insider can be used.

'Time', as can be seen in Figure 2, is another matter of concern within the corpus – especially on *Viator*, the word appears frequently. It signifies the temporal preoccupation that characterizes tourist behavior – that of optimizing and regulating one's allotted holidaymaking time. The most frequent cluster it appears in is 'free time': the 'in between' period during the tour in which tourists can walk around by themselves (e.g. 'enjoy some free time at the waterfront'). Again, we see that many of the experiences that *Viator* offers are archetypically 'touristic'. This would suggest that the insider, instead of becoming a 'friend' as the header picture suggests, mainly acts to uncover or disclose parts of the city that are otherwise kept concealed. The high frequency of the word 'guide' confirms this suggestion: more than in the other two subcorpora, its frequent use on *Viator* indicates that the advertisements are set up in a recognizable style of the tourist brochure, in which the promise of the guide's knowledge and reliability are reaffirmed. The word is used most often as a noun: the cluster 'guide will', being the most frequent one, demonstrates the promissory indexicality (e.g. 'your guide will reveal', 'your guide will navigate'). It is a promise that is familiar from the travel brochure on which the platform is modeled, and the adverbial modifiers of the word, such as 'expert guide' and 'professional guide', further show that *Viator*'s front as a peer-to-peer platform is primarily a rhetorical construction.

Vayable

Shifting the focus to peer-to-peer platform *Vayable*, the insider appears again, but is framed differently: the contractors on the platform are again constructed as experts, but here the freedom they have to market their own product (and thus, the personal contact between tourist and touree without 'unnecessary meddling' of the platform itself) is emphasized. The front page reads 'Discover and book unique experiences offered by local insiders', while the 'How This Works' page adds: 'Vayable is a home for anyone looking to experience honest, local culture through experiences created and hosted by passionate local Insiders' (see https://www.vayable.com/how_this_works).

Comparing this peer-to-peer platform with tourism operator *Viator*, where insiders are produced in terms of their ratified entrepreneurial reliability, we can see that on *Vayable* their entrepreneurial spirit and intrinsic local knowledge are emphasized. What renders the insider so particularly effective as a concept is perhaps the recognizability of the work relationships that it is a part of: we can recognize both the figure of the comfortably predictable local, the associate partner in the system of tourism – as well as the wayward, self-employed local who runs her own business and accompanies the tourist at her own leisure. This work relation, however, remains implicit at all times, as the anti-touristic voice involves presenting tours as an exchange amongst equals, instead of an asymmetrical tourist-touree relationship. *Vayable*'s 'How This Works' page offers: 'In the Nineteenth Century an industry began to grow around traveling for enrichment, culture and human connection.' Similarly, the types of testimonial that are found on this platform do not so much refer to the excellent knowledge of the guide, but employ an existential register (see Figure 4; see also Wang 1999). Matters regarding "what it means to be human, what it means to be happy, and what it means to be oneself" (Steiner and Reisinger 2006: 300) are key here, and the functional goal of *Vayable* seems to be to frame the insider as a figure in the niche of offbeat and alternative tourism (Dann 1996) that opens up the possibilities for such modes of travel.

"Vayable has forever changed how I experience the world. I now always have a friend and amazing experiences waiting for me at every destination.

PETER G. (COMMERCIAL PILOT)

Figure 4. Vayable testimonial (retrieved from https://www.vayable.com/how_this_works)

Further, personal contact with the host is considered much more important here than it was with *Viator* – in this sense, the kind of anti-tourism on offer here is not necessarily based on the solitary, romantic gaze described by Urry (2011). It is sometimes argued that the anti-tourist logic assumes that more authentic experiences are found as fewer other tourists are involved (Jacobsen 2000: 287). While this seems still a recognizable sentiment, it needs to be added that in an increasingly saturated tourist sphere, in which most travelers will encounter other travelers, the anti-tourist structure refers no longer primarily to the need to be alone, but also to individualization and personalization. That is, the traveler wants to personally compose his or her experience to significant detail, and this includes the personal contact with the local other.[149]

Looking at the word 'experience', then, it is found to be significantly more common on *Viator* and *Vayable* than it is on *Spotted by Locals*. The word is used colloquially as a stand-in for 'tour' (e.g. 'your experience concludes' or 'start your experience'), and modified for exaggeration ('unique experience'). But more significantly, the word signifies a difference in the function of the insider on *Vayable* and *Viator*, respectively. In the *Viator* subcorpus, the top clusters surrounding the word 'local' are 'led by a local', 'tips from a local', and 'absorb the local'. Looking at the context of these words, it becomes clear that *Viator* produces locality as a resource that might be consumed, but not experienced. By contrast, *Vayable* contains clusters around 'local' involve 'like a local' and 'as a local', signaling how the locality that is produced by the insider can be transferred to the visiting tourist through physical proximity. The local is, in other words, a commodified identity type that is *translocal* (i.e., a decoupling of identity and territory). This can be further corroborated by briefly turning to the reviews of *Vayable* tours, where user attitudes toward internalizing locality emerge. For instance, in an evaluation of an advertisement for a local tour of London, a satisfied customer responds: 'Excellent local tour! [...] I feel more like local after the experience.' (https://www.vayable.com/experiences/373-explore-london-like-a-local).

What is telling in this context is that many of the types of experiences on offer on *Vayable* are not so much spectacular, but rather of a commonplace nature. One insider in Paris writes: "I'll help you understand the layout of Paris, how to get around, tips for using the metro, buying tickets, French etiquette, and more" (https://www.vayable.com/experiences/1494-navigate-paris). The information, here, is decidedly unspectacular, as such information may surely be found in most travel

[149] It might be added that, while the service-providing locals are construed as wilful entrepreneurs, it remains unclear to what extent they are actually benefitting from the peer-to-peer service they are using. In their study of crowdsourced micro-tasking services such as Amazon Mechanical Turk, Ekbia and Nardi (2014) note that an important effect of P2P systems is their assertion of 'a functionalist view' of society, in which questions about social and/or economic factors remain hidden from view. The platform, meanwhile, does confer upon the insider the necessity to open up to and become personally involved with those who pay a visit. In this context, the production of locality on *Vayable* implies a potentially more intensified intrusion into the personal sphere of the local guide than in the case of *Viator*.

guides. Locality, again, derives wholly from the everyday embodied act, the 'human point of contact' as *Vayable* puts it on its 'How This Works' page. The anti-tourist attitude here is expressed through a stylization of the mundane routines of travel – after all, the instructions of how to buy tickets can be found on most ticket machines, and might be asked to dozens of (local) people. In other words, these advertisements engage in the customization of the mundane, turning it into a noteworthy event or 'experience' by the presence of this specific insider. This stylization and customization of course serves an ideological purpose. It is a commercial distinguishing, grading, and branding of 'local' activities that are in fact rather mundane; it is an attempt to make the customer feel 'normal' (and not a tourist) through a whole touristic discourse of abnormality. This shows the intrinsic theatricality of 'becoming a local': travelers, rather than transforming into a local, learn how to play the role of being the local.

In more general terms of their content, the difference between the two corpora can be underscored by looking at the number of tours that are posted by their tour operators both on *Vayable* and *Viator*. As it turns out, the overlap in these tours is negligible, which seems to indicate that both platforms offer distinct kinds of advertisements, and relatedly, distinct kinds of production of locality.[150] The most salient word in the *Vayable* subcorpus, 'food', signifies a related difference in the production of locality compared to *Viator*. Local cuisine is heavily employed as an index of locality, with 'street food' and 'local food' being the two most frequent clusters. The preference for tasting unfamiliar food as an anti-touristic attitude has been established before (Pearce 1982: 32; Jacobsen 2000: 293), and the sizeable difference between *Viator* on the one hand, and *Vayable* and *Spotted by Locals* on the other, is telling in this regard. One such food insider in the 'non-touristic, typical Parisian neighborhood' of Marché d'Aligre in Paris writes: "Yes, it is important to eat what locals eat, but even more important: to do it the way they do! I'm a food historian with six years of food touring experience" (see https://www.vayable.com/experiences/5883-learn-to-eat-like-a-local-in-paris).

The manual performances and types of *etiquette* that the advertisement puts forward – how to order, how to eat, and so on – appear throughout the corpora, showing that the knowledge constituting locality is not merely denotational: knowing which food is popular alone is not enough. This shift of attention from the commodity of food to a secondary aspect of it (the way in which it is consumed) is a form of culture as accent, where "[small] differences acquire the status of fundamental aspects of being" (Blommaert and Varis 2012: 1). We may note that the anti-touristic attitude is characterized by the assignment of such 'metonymic marks' (ibid.: 2) that signify a traveler identity.

[150] The *Spotted by Locals* corpus has no overlap with the other two subcorpora, as the content of its listings is structurally dissimilar (that is, it consists of informative posts rather than listings of tour offerings).

Spotted by Locals

Turning now to the front page of *Spotted by Locals* (spottedbylocals.com), another header with rotating photos can be seen, and the concept of the insider returns as well: the service is presented as a collection of 'City guides with insider tips.' This platform, instead of offering tours, provides travel guides written by locals – under the header one can read that the platform offers 'up-to-date insider tips for city loving locals.' In terms of length, the stories are roughly as long as those on *Viator* and *Vayable*, and depict comparable places – the main difference is that the provided information itself is the service on offer here. Locals are occasionally dubbed 'spotters', which refers to their capacity of recognizing which places are 'tourist traps', and which ones are unknown to the greater public and may thus potentially endow one with social capital of 'travel' (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Spotted by Locals front page (retrieved from http://www.spottedbylocals.com)

The platform offers the promise that these 'locals' correspond to all the characteristics that are commonly associated with them within the tourism sector: 'Our spotters live in the city they write about, speak the local language, write only about their favorite spots, and keep their articles up to date.' One of these locals in the introduction movie of the platform rhetorically asks: "Why lose time going to all the tourist places when you can do what the locals do?" (http://www.spottedbylocals.com/about-us/, accessed 3 March 2016).

The insider thus aids in the discovery of the 'typically' local site or scene. A related keyword that can be pulled here – which turns out to be quite more salient on *Spotted by Locals* than on the other platforms – is the word 'find'. The term, it turns out, refers to the tourist and not the insider: it is the visitor who has to do the

corporeal exploratory work, as *Spotted by Locals*' insiders are absent during the tour itself.

While tourists are provided with precise and up-to-date instructions on where to go and what is worthwhile (on the platform's front page, one can download the official app to look up relevant information on mobile devices, while walking through the city), the lack of an attendant tour guide allows the platform to brand itself as an anti-touristic means for visitors to explore the city by themselves, and thus become a local.

On the 'About Us' page, a video advertisement is offered in which a tourist can be seen standing beside the Acropolis in Athens with a dissatisfied look. '99% of tourists in Athens visit the Acropolis...', the accompanying text reads. The tourist grabs his notebook and literally ticks off a box next to the name 'Acropolis' (next to 'Eiffel Tower' and 'Statue of Liberty'). The next shot is set in an outdoor restaurant overlooking the same ruins, showing two people dining. 'Less than 1% visits this local favorite', the ad now reads, followed by the slogan: 'Be the 1%'. Meanwhile, the insiders who provided these tourists with the information remain invisible in the ad – like they do during the trip itself. *Spotted by Locals*' curators are here capable of mythologizing and spectacularizing the experiences on offer – as well as their alleged capacity of taking customers to a 'back region' – even further. The production of locality here becomes an informational matter entirely; the authenticity of the offered experience, therefore, can only be safeguarded if it hails from a 'resident' or 'aboriginal' source. This explains why the platform safeguards the reliability of its locals by requiring them to live in the city they write about.

The most notable and frequent word in the *Spotted by Locals* subcorpus is 'place', and it proves an opposite index to that of the 'experience' that was found on *Vayable*. Since *Spotted by Locals* contains a repository of travel tips, locality is produced not through personal contact but instead by the dissemination of information. The keyword is used almost exclusively as a noun (the verb-form comprises under 1% of the word's total usage), and it appears in crucial sentences in the advertisements, as the word usually refers back to the name of the tourist site that is being recommended. The most frequently occurring 3-word cluster that 'place' is a part of is 'place for a', which refers to the use value of a certain place (instead of the inherent value of the place itself). Typical of the language of tourism, it includes suggestions that the visitor may pick up (e.g. 'place for a coffee', 'place for a walk', etc.). Several other words appearing high in the list of salient keywords can be found, which may be understood as collocates of these places: most frequently, the word 'bar'. The latter word is, as can be seen in Figure 2, typical of *Spotted by Locals*. The presence of the bar seems to point in a similar direction as the attention to 'food' in the *Vayable* subcorpus: they both act as markers of a 'traveler' discourse within which the 'true' identity of a city is revealed. While the current platform explicitly incorporates a discourse of authenticity and anti-tourism (as we see in the introduction movie), the locality that is produced is still based on the recog-

nizable touristic image of a city. One local writes: "For me, this place doesn't have any specific visual theme, but rather it has a certain special atmosphere; one which most accurately reflects my experience and definition of the city of Barcelona – bohemian, alternative, relaxed" (see http:// www.spottedbylocals.com/barcelona/mariatchi/). The bar here is used as a trigger for the tourist's imagination by becoming a synecdoche for an archetypical touristic impression of the city. The place is metonymic; it represents something that is not itself; it is a *pars pro toto* for a neighborhood or the city as a whole. Through systems of popularity, either through metrics or customer feedback, a comparison becomes possible between mythological localities that users might want to visit.

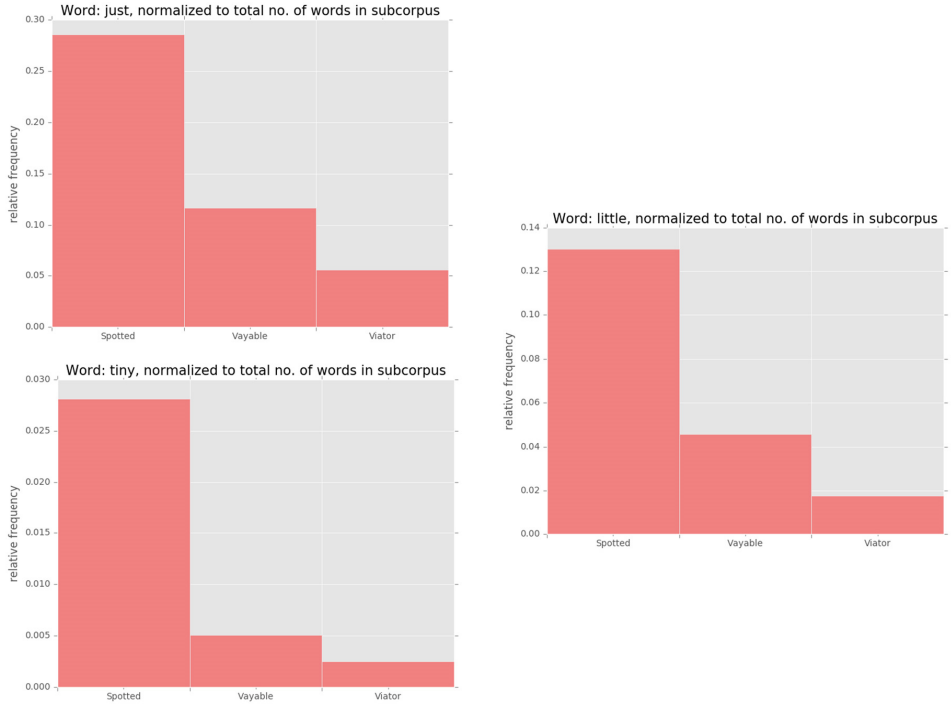

Figure 6. Comparative measurements of words indexing precision

As the use of the word 'bar' indicates, the type of knowledge for the insider is such that it must be up to date; the production of locality in the above instances refers to being acutely aware of the volatile and ever-changing social cityscape. In line with this, there is a significant number of words in *Spotted by Locals* that share a potential emphasis on knowledge about local details. A striking keyword can be found in this context: 'little'. It appears almost exclusively as an adjective and adverb throughout the corpus, and is employed with notable frequency on *Spotted*

by Locals, and the same goes for other adverbs such as 'small', 'different', and 'old'. These words index a certain degree of authenticity, which is injected into the nouns that they modify. But tellingly, the word is not just a modifier for certain places. Especially on *Spotted by Locals* it is referred to in its broader sense, referring to time ('come a little later'), costs ('it costs a little less'), itineraries ('a little detour'), and so on. As such, it seems a pointer to a feature of anti-touristic language, in that it is precise, small-scale, and fine-tuned. We see the same pattern in words such as 'just' and 'tiny': although rather rare, they appear with notable frequency in the *Spotted by Locals* corpus – especially when comparing those numbers to the frequency of the word in the other subcorpora ('little' comprises 0.13%, 'just' covers 0.28%, and 'tiny' makes up 0.64% of the total word count in the subcorpus. See Figure 6.)

Conclusion

To summarize, all of the above websites serve as producers of insiders and 'locality' (see also Heller, Jaworsky and Thurlow 2014: 441). Yet in all varieties, we ought to note, the construct is a normative projection of utility: imagining someone as an insider is linked to the symbolic capital that it represents for the one who does the imagining. In other words, insiders exist by virtue of the fact that their 'insider-ness', understood as commodified standing reserve, can be consumed by the outsider/visitor. It also appears that the mechanics of commodification and touristic imagination differ in subtle but significant manners throughout these platforms. *Viator* construes its insiders liberally, both referring to their own employees and to custom selected experts catering to a potentially mass tourist audience. As such, the service is the farthest removed from the romantic anti-tourism framework whose discourse it nevertheless makes use of. *Vayable* constructs its insiders as local entrepreneurs and offers an altruistic discourse in which the tourist contributes to local communities. *Spotted by Locals*, finally, constructs the role of the insider by focusing on his or her capacity to guide the tourist to the destination's back region.

In all of these contexts, insiders provide a stylization and metonymization of everyday personal experiences. Locality, in this sense, is a type of experience prompted by minute personal activities. Buying a bus ticket or ordering a dish, under this logic, can become metonymic markers for 'being a local'. This process involves the commodification of locals or insiders as 'others' for the visitor to consume. The contact between hosts and guests remains goal-oriented at all times, however; the other is not an end in itself (i.e., the other is not an 'Other'). Instead, their role is one of use value: to construct and validate certain kinds of stylized experiences. Through this process, locality is allegedly conferred upon the visitor by the 'authentic' local. The identity statements made by the insiders on these P2P-

platforms, in this context, can be read as forms of self-interpellation (Lange 2009; Varis and Blommaert 2015): individuals hail themselves as bearers of commodified local knowledge, inscribing themselves in and expressing their affiliation with the ideological configuration of the insider and the production of locality.

The stylization of everyday experiences in commercial P2P environments signifies that the production of locality is in fact not a phenomenon of anti-tourism, but might rather be called a form of supertourism. It deals in a form of play, namely playing that the visitor is the other. This form of play is instantiated on the P2P platforms where visitors begin their journey: the metrified, gamified and up-to-date system of listings allows for immediate comparison between experiences and insiders. This acute comparativeness is remarkable: in an age of more broadly democratized online access, one might expect different individuals on platforms to share and leverage radically different types of stories. Yet the types of advertisements we have seen involve very similar orders of indexicality about 'Rome-ness', 'London-ness', and so on.

In sum, there exists a paradoxical relation between the kinds of comparable, stereotypical, and homogeneous touristic experiences we find on P2P platforms, and the ideology of personalization and translocality we find in their discourses. Despite the processes of globalization, superdiversity and translocality that complicate and disrupt archetypical tourist/local distinctions, and which are the rhetorical selling point of services like *Airbnb* (the promise being: *you do not have to be a tourist anymore*), we see that essentialist images of otherness are maintained within this globalized, interconnected order. In fact, 'disruptive' online systems seem to play a role in promoting these forms of otherness, precisely because of the processes of commodifying identity that they engage in, by rendering identity measurable and comparable in online ecologies. By the same token, notions of authenticity are promoted in the touristic vernacular precisely because of this commodification and comparison of identity. The question becomes: who is the most authentic? In this sense, the guides on P2P platforms are presented as carriers of 'objective' authenticity, as Wang (1999) calls it – authentic because of their inherent characteristics, which can be measured and compared by the customer. The places they show to the visitor, meanwhile, are considered authentic in a 'constructive' way: they become real through the power that insiders/locals have to define them as such.

One consequence of the production of locality in platforms under study here amounts to a matter of supervision. The popularization of insider platforms contributes to the spatial distribution of the city, with a 'rental boom' occurring in several of the world's most popular tourist destinations, and local governments drawing up legislation to control the civic and economic ramifications of the sharing economy.[151] This is something further research may concern itself with: local residents, capable of turning their neighborhoods 'inside out' and directly

[151] See for instance *The Guardian* (2014, 2016).

branding them to potential customers, might be increasingly aware of the symbolic material in the different parts of their neighborhoods.

While the relationships between insiders and outsiders may be as much a front as the types of experiences they are assumed to 'subvert', a social realist approach seems necessary here. The production of locality does not just constitute false backstages (MacCannell 1999: 102) that only claim to unlock the 'real life' lived in a certain place. We need to take the P2P movement more seriously: the places that are touted may, in many of these cases, indeed be the places that are popular with locals and less often visited by great numbers of tourists. Similarly, a tour organized by a citizen who has lived in the region for years will often offer different insights into local customs and mental frames, different from those we may discern through 'by-the-numbers' tourist operators. This reliance on the local is not a new phenomenon, as we noted already.

What is new is that the signs through which one can identify tourist areas in a city become less and less clear as tourism becomes in itself anti-touristic. The fact that we can see someone, house keys in hand, stepping out of a modest apartment in the center of the city (*Airbnb*), driving around by bicycle or in a car with a local license plate (*Snapcar*), or sitting in a restaurant surrounded by locals (*TripAdvisor*), is no sufficient signifier to indicate that such a person actually lives or works in the region. If theorists are right to assume that tourists can come to be defined as locals by mastering only minimal amounts of the hosts' language (Piller 2002; Pennycook 2012), the same can be said about the semiotic capacities of direct, peer-to-peer locality production. P2P networked platforms, we might say via Appadurai, engender the 'production of unreliably local subjects'. This is why, in the end, anti-tourism is not the right term to describe the social dynamics of these platforms. To take an antagonistic position to tourism, in our context, would not mean to pit oneself against the 'commonality of crowds', but against the relentless ideology of individuality and translocality that characterizes it, as well as the accompanying feelings of uncertainty about who, in actuality, *is* a tourist.

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4.2 Pilgrim or tourist? Modeling two types of travel bloggers

Tom van Nuenen and Suzanne van der Beek (forthcoming). Tourist or pilgrim? Modeling two types of travel bloggers. *Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet*.

Introduction

The pilgrim and tourist constitute one of the most persistent dichotomies in tourism studies (cf. Walter and Reader 1992; Badone and Roseman 2004; Margry 2008). In its most polemical sense, the mass tourist is a mindless pleasure-seeking anti-hero, following the tight scripts and insured packages that mass tourism provides. Such a tourist is part of a flock, herd, or drove (Fussell 1979: 33; Boorstin 1987), and is sometimes connected to other colorful metaphors such as lemmings (Lodge 1991: 5), invasions (Palin 1992: 102), or barbarians (Mitford 1959). By contrast, pilgrims are classified as religious soul-searchers, part of a liminal sociability (Turner and Turner 1978) whose travel scripts and scenarios are based upon the sacred.

From early on, the dichotomy has met with critique. It has been suggested that the ontological structure of pilgrimage is comparable to that of the modern-day tourist. Both MacCannell (1976) and Graburn (1977) outlined how both pilgrims and tourists seek knowledge and transformation of the self through an extraordinary journey.[152] Following the Turners' famous statement that 'a tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist' (1987), many other writers have explored the similarities of these two types of travelers. (Moore 1980; Lett 1983; Pfaffenburger 1983;Walter and Reader 1993; Eade 1992; Nolan and Nolan 1992; Rinschede 1992; Bauman 1996; Santos 2002; Vukonic 2002; Collins-Kreiner 2009; Post 2013; Knox and Hamman 2014; Post and Van der Beek forthcoming). Perhaps the most influential contribution was made by the volume *Intersecting Journeys* edited by Ellen Badone and Sharon R. Roseman, in which a collection of contributions explored the realization that "rigid dichotomies between pilgrimage and tourism, and pilgrims and tourists, no longer seem tenable in the shifting world of postmodern travel" (2004: 2).

In spite of these nuances, the dichotomy certainly has not collapsed. To an extent, the tourist/pilgrim dyad still serves as an important epistemological tool: offsetting pilgrims against tourists is often used to focus on the specificities of either group (Post 2013). Indeed, in recent years the twosome has again been deployed in order to argue that the overlapping elements of tourists and pilgrims should not result in undermining the difference between the two figures altogether. Dutch anthropologist Peter Jan Margry has objected to the vague usage of the term

[152] This idea of the journey as possibility for transformation has been critiqued by Edward Bruner, who argued that the transformative potential for travelers is highly limited, while the changes that tourism create at the destination site is often overlooked.

'pilgrimage', in particular when referring to tourist journeys as 'secular pilgrimages'. He argues that the convergence of sacred and profane forms of travel does not result in a merging of the two (Margry 2008: 30). In response to a 'playful exploration' of the term by Knox and Hannam (2013), Margry argues that the term pilgrimage is in danger of becoming a non-specific, non-academic concept: "Why call it pilgrimage if such behavior cannot be accounted for as pilgrimage? Is it simply the lure of an intriguing word replete with expressive connotations, or is it an exercise in presenting superficial analogies, without demonstrating basic commonalities?" (Margry 2013: 243).

Before accepting that pilgrimage and tourism are theoretically conflated – or as Margry warns, inflated – we should consider the discourses of the travelers themselves. Both tourist and pilgrim discourses are produced in great numbers by amateur travel writers, increasingly in an online environment. These narratives may help us to better understand the distinctions and similarities between both forms of experience. According to *BlogPulse* and *Technorati*, the number of blogs in 2004 was 3 million and increased to 164 million in 2011. In 2008, the topic of travel was reported to be the ninth most important one, representing 28% of all blogs (Bosangit, Dulnuan and Mena 2012). These texts have a very real influence on the manner in which people understand and talk about travel.[153] Therefore, the present article proposes to introduce a new outlook on the debate about the pilgrim/tourist dichotomy (which has already spread across anthropology, religious studies, leisure studies, and philosophy) by adopting a macro-perspective to this multiplicity of online produced pilgrim and tourist narratives. By applying computational stylistic techniques, which are new to this debate, the paper discusses the differences in discourse practiced by pilgrims to Santiago de Compostela and tourists in New York City, on the Dutch travel blog repository of *waarbenjij.nu*.

Methodologically, the paper provides a hybrid reading, combining macro-analysis with close reading, in order to 1) find patterns that can indicate genre distinction, and 2) analyze themes within the hypothesized genres. This is done by applying several methods (topic modeling, document-term matrices, POS-tagging) to the corpora of bloggers. Via this combined method of distant and close reading in analyzing a large corpus of online generated travel narratives, a contribution is made to the understanding of the typological classification of pilgrims and tourists. The paper ends with the proposal of a new continuum based on textual elements, to classify pilgrim and tourist narratives.

[153] According to a 2013 *Technocrati* report, blogs are the third most influential digital resource when making overall purchases, behind retail websites and brand websites. (Technorati Media. 2013. 'Digital Influence Report.' Accessed August 14 2014. See http://technorati.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06 /tm2013DIR3 .pdf)

Capturing pilgrim and tourist blogs

The computational gathering and analysis of large corpora of texts has been undertaken by corpus linguists for some time now (Baker 2007: 1). The practice temporarily de-emphasizes individual occurrences of features or words in favor of a focus on the larger system or corpus and its aggregate patterns and trends. As Matthew Jockers (2013) has rightfully emphasized, this allows us to support or challenge existing theories and assumptions, while calling our attention to general patterns and missed trends in order to better understand the context in which individual texts, words, or features arise. In the process of distant reading, as opposed to close reading, the reality of the text undergoes a process of deliberate reduction and abstraction, and the distance in distant reading is considered not an obstacle but a specific form of knowledge (Moretti 2005: 1). Yet it remains important to remember, as Ramsay (2011) has noted, that the type of analysis that is prevalent in literary studies, i.e. literary-critical interpretation, is also an insistently subjective manner of engagement. Computational results can be used to provoke such a directed reading, and that is precisely what this paper aims to do.

The texts discussed in the present study are taken from the popular Dutch travelogue *waarbenjij.nu*. Founded in 2003, this blog now offers over 2.9 million travel stories (the vast majority of which are in Dutch). The corpus was built by scraping the website from the front end, i.e. entering a word in the search bar as the main filter. Texts featuring the term *pelgrim* ('pilgrim') were selected to comprise the corpus of pilgrim narratives. As the Camino to Santiago de Compostela is the predominantly popular pilgrimage for Dutch travelers, this method proved to offer a fairly clean corpus of Camino narratives.[154] There are, of course, other types of pilgrims than Camino pilgrims, but the Camino is not only the most popular pilgrimage, it has also reinvented itself over the last twenty to thirty years as a typical product of its time. It is the preeminent pilgrimage that allows for, and encourages, (religious) diversity and a focus on self-exploration (Van Uden and Pieper 1995: 205-219; Harman 2014: 128-145; Oviedo, De Courcier and Farias 2014). 'Every pilgrim creates their own Camino', is its slogan for a reason.

The corpus of tourist narratives was assembled out of texts featuring the phrase 'New York'.[155] This search resulted in a very diverse corpus of tourist narratives, some of them written by people who only came over for two or three days, others travelers who journeyed through the whole of North America, again others young people who spend a couple of weeks or even months in New York City as exchange students or interns. Of course, tourism as a whole includes many different kinds of travelers; the backgrounds of the people taking pictures on the Brooklyn Bridge or

[154] In the Netherlands, modern pilgrimage is often understood within the demarcations of the popular Camino. The pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela has seen numbers of official Dutch pilgrims rise from 690 pilgrims in 1985 to 2,888 (total: 215,880) in 2013.

[155] The term 'New York' was entered instead of 'New York City', as tourists usually use the first to refer to the second (to the extent that the search term 'New York City' resulted in significantly fewer search results).

in Central Park are wildly varying. This diversity of New York City tourists mirrors the diversity in pilgrims found on the Camino, who travel to Santiago with a variety of backgrounds, expectations, modes of transportation, and amount of time to spend. Further, instead of choosing a form of tourism that resembles pilgrimage strongly (e.g. backpacking through Southeast Asia), the search term 'New York' was chosen to ensure that the corpora would consist of texts about journeys that are structurally dissimilar. The goal was to capture an important difference between pilgrims and tourists in the conception of one's destination: while the pilgrim focuses attention on the journey, the tourist sees this physical trek to the place of interest primarily as a necessity, and starts her/his experience only when s/he has arrived. The experience of New York City starts when one arrives at the destination, while the pilgrimage ends at that point. This insight will here be highlighted, rather than played down.

A first realization that came from this first explorative stage is that pilgrims are much more comfortable with their role as pilgrim than tourists are with their role as tourist. By using the word 'pilgrim' as a search term, we have arguably not missed out on a great deal of narratives, as pilgrims repeatedly overuse the term: it is often used where it is not necessary. For example, pilgrims write 'I met two other pilgrims who…' (when they might have written 'I met two people/women/Germans who…'), constantly underlining their identity as pilgrims. By contrast, a search for the term 'tourist' produced a set of narratives that consisted of diverse writings by people who commented on 'playing the tourist for a day' or commenting upon the behavior of other travelers. One would be hard-pressed to find tourists writing that they 'met two other tourists today'. Tourists are much less eager to identify themselves as such than pilgrims are.[156]

The next step of the macroanalysis involved topic modeling.[157] Topic modeling tools automatically extract topics from texts, taking a single text or corpus and searching for patterns in the use of words, attempting to inject semantic meaning into vocabulary. A topic, to the program, is a list of words that occur in statistically meaningful ways. Topic modeling is unsupervised – that is, the program running the analysis does not know anything about the meaning of the words in a text. Instead, it is assumed that any piece of text is composed by an author by selecting words from possible baskets of words (the number of which is determined

[156] It has been argued before that tourists are bothered by the presence of other tourists, while pilgrims welcome the presence with other pilgrims (Redfoot 1984; Coleman and Cran 2004; Urry 2011; Week 2012). Furthermore, pilgrims are traditionally understood as highly reflexive travelers because of the religious significance, deep histories, and routinized itineraries (Badone and Roseman 2004: 11).

[157] Several theorists have written accounts of topic modeling for humanities scholars without a mathematical background. See for example Jockers, M.L. (2011) 'The LDA buffet is now open; or, latent dirichlet allocation for English majors.' September 29. http://www.matthewjockers.net/2011/09/29/ the-lda-buffet-is-now-open-or-latent-dirichlet-allocation-for-english-majors/ or Underwood, T. (2012) 'Topic modeling made just simple enough.' April 7. http://tedunderwood.com/2012/04/07/topic-modeling-made-just-simple-enough/

by the user) where each basket corresponds to a topic or discourse.[158] From this assumption it follows that one could mathematically decompose a text into the probable baskets from whence the words came. The tool goes through this process over and over again until it settles on the most likely distribution of words into baskets, resulting in the titular topics. There are many different topic-modeling programs available; in this paper we use the well-known package of MALLET (McCallum 2002). The topic models it produces provide us with probabilistic data sortations, which we argue are indicative of certain discursive gravitational points and latent structures behind our collection of texts. We can then contextualize these structures with theories from tourism and pilgrimage studies. The *Mining the Dispatch* project of the University of Richmond, for instance, uses MALLET to explore 'the dramatic and often traumatic changes as well as the sometimes surprising continuities in the social and political life of Civil War Richmond.'[159] Another example can be found in the work of historian Cameron Blevins, who uses MALLET to 'recognize and conceptualize the recurrent themes' in Martha Ballard's diary.[160]

A vital part of any type of computational corpus linguistics is formed by pre-processing, as this determines which documents and words are taken into account in the analysis.[161] Topic modeling can be put to use in this regard, allowing insight into prevalent noise in the corpus. Notable topics in the first topic model for both corpora indicated noise in the corpus, with words such as 'the', 'and', 'to', 'for', 'this, 'it', which obviously pertains to English narratives, and a topic with words such as '*park'*, '*auto'*, '*bus'*, '*dieren*' ('park', 'car', 'bus', 'animals'), indicating that the corpus was contaminated by Dutch travelers to other holy sites (mainly Buddhist temples in Malaysia) and visits to South Africa's 'Pilgrim's Rest'. After clean-up, the corpus contained 2,674,051 words in the pilgrim travel blogs and 2,535,353 words in the tourist travel blogs, distributed over 6,943 blogs.

Analyzing topic models of travelogues

Structurally, we can immediately note some differences between the subcorpora. Firstly, the number of unique words in the tourist corpus is 74,068, which is 80% of the variety in the pilgrim corpus (91,767 words). Pilgrim blogs tend to be longer as well: the average number of words per blog post in the pilgrim corpus is 1,256,

[158] As Ted Underwood notes, "the notion that documents are produced by discourses rather than authors is alien to common sense, but not alien to literary theory." Underwood, T. (2012) 'Topic modeling made just simple enough.' April 7. http://tedunderwood.com/2012/04/07/topic-modeling-made-just-simple-enough/

[159] Nelson, R.K. 'Mining the Dispatch.' Accessed July 8 2015. http://dsl.richmond.edu/dispatch/ pages/intro

[160] Blevins, C. (2010) 'Topic modeling Martha Ballard's diary.' April 1. http://www.cameronblevins.org /posts/topic-modeling-martha-ballards-diary/

[161] Jockers, M.L. (2013) 'Secret recipe for topic modeling themes.' April 12. http://www.matthewjockers.net /2013/04/12/secret-recipe-for-topic-modeling-themes/

while the average of the tourist blogs is 501 words. These differences hint at discursive differences in the corpora: pilgrims seem to deal with their journeys in a more elaborate manner.

Further, the topic model we created consisted largely of words that had no great meaning outside of their context, e.g. '*een*', '*te*', '*je*', '*als*' ('an', 'too', 'you', 'if'). The texts can be more purposefully analyzed when not all types of words are incorporated in the analysis. In order to discard the words that attribute little to an understanding of the thematic difference between the corpora, we chose to categorize the words in our texts on the basis of their grammatical function. This allowed us to iterate over specific word categories in order to see if the differences are persistent.[162] Such grammatical filtering can be done by using a Part-of-Speech (POS) tagger, which determines the grammatical function of all words in the corpus. For the present paper we used *TreeTagger*, a probabilistic tagging method that is about 95% accurate in tagging grammatical functions (Schmid 1994), and is widely used by researchers due to its easy availability (Alegria, Leturia and Sharoff 2009: 29). *TreeTagger* contains a POS tagging script for Dutch words, which was used to tag our corpus. By applying this technique, we were able to analyze the corpora based only on one specific part of speech. We analyzed our corpora based upon the usage of nouns, which are argued to be especially suitable for capturing thematic trends (Jockers 2013: 131).

Next, we constructed a topic model with ten topics, and split the corpora in small chunks of (about) 500 words each. This allows us to preserve context that would otherwise be discarded: we allow the model to discover themes that occur only in specific places within blogs and not just across entire blogs. Using the original text files, varying greatly in size, would mean that the small amount of themes introduced in short texts would be granted the same amount of significance as the much larger amount of themes logically introduced in longer texts (after all, our topic model weighs the prevalent topics in each document against the others). To ensure that themes are valued more equally, the notion of personal authorship thus had to be neglected, in order to maintain the variety of narrative themes. Of course, this overemphasizes the themes of certain authors over those of others, but the size of the corpus was deemed large enough to answer for this shortcoming. Jockers has argued that 500-1000 word chunks are most helpful when modeling novels,[163] and we have chosen to stay on the low end of the spectrum, using chunks

[162] Another popular solution for this problem is the introduction of a stop list: a manually composed list of words that should not be incorporated in the analysis. On this list, one could include any kind of words that is deemed irrelevant for the query. This stop list would therefore be at the same time highly subjective and radically incomplete. We decided that it would not suit the needs for the present analyses.

[163] Jockers, M.L. (2013) 'Secret recipe for topic modeling themes.' April 12. http://www.matthewjockers.net /2013/04/12/secret-recipe-for-topic-modeling-themes/

of 500 words each for most data processing purposes. The topic model that is created from this information was visualized in a stacked bar chart.[164]

The topic model produced 10 topics, alongside the relative importance or 'weight' of each topic, represented by the Dirichlet parameter. These topics can mostly be labelled as pertaining to either the pilgrim and tourist discourse (see the 'emphasis' column in Figure 2). In order to get a thorough view of the two types of travelers under discussion here, these topics and the words in them can be made sense of via two different ways: by exploring their differences and by exploring their similarities. Topics 2 and 4 can be clearly identified as pertaining to respectively the pilgrim and the tourist discourse, as they incorporate some notably different but parallel words that refer to both types of travelers. These two topics represent the two most significant group of themes and include some interesting parallel terms that lend themselves very well for a more contextualized reading. Then, there is one topic that includes the terms found in both corpora, topic 0. After we explore the different terms used in topic 2 and 4, we will focus on the words found in topic 0, in order to understand the terms that are prevalent in both corpora. It is reasonable to argue that these words, while concurrent, are employed differently by our two traveler types. The second step in our analysis will therefore be a close reading of these similarities found in topic 0.

#	weight	emphasis	top 30 words per topic (cleaned)
0	1.15857	both	dag mensen uur tijd dagen s keer goed beetje stad jaar weg huis moment avond auto bus nacht week nederland hotel man aantal soort zon kamer was avonds weken foto
1	0.11581	pilgrim	santiago pelgrim weg tocht camino pelgrims johan route leven compostela kathedraal kerk reis km n pelgrimstocht god april spanje jacobus loop st rugzak maart rome plaats t doel compostella jaar
2	0.16716	pilgrim	km camino pelgrims santiago pelgrim uur herberg refugio dag route albergue weg spanje la kathedraal tocht del stad bed san n burgos dorp koffie meter foto dorpje leon kerk fiets
3	0.40301	pilgrim	uur kilometer weg koffie kerk pad loop bed water zon dorp rugzak man route kamer staat km ontbijt brood hotel vrouw wijn tafel pelgrims n eten schoenen stuk caf voeten
4	0.25886	tourist	new york park central uur dag times manhattan s hotel stad metro building uitzicht state empire city hostel museum island the bus zero vrijheidsbeeld bridge street brooklyn tijd mensen th
5	0.12156	tourist	to the you for and vegas that are all with it las will have but do canyon this as hotel up see like not make can your strip very what
6	0.14008	pilgrim	km camping route dag st uur mei pelgrim la gite weg fiets tent tocht kilometer pelgrims juni gr jacques d frans frankrijk etappe klim ko stempel franse koffie santiago stad
7	0.07304	pilgrim	kilometer luc dorp jaar refugio nacht fiets jaren k ron december oktober november geld prijs bar ezels portugal afrika land dorpje zuid porto hoofdstad vader stadje thee schapen tent restaurant
8	0.18338	tourist	new york uur week vliegtuig vlucht beetje tijd fotos ff goed camp nederland t berichtje weken amerika vliegveld echt schiphol koffers bed school dagen zin kamer meiden site weekend huis
9	0.17011	tourist	week school weekend new weken kerst huis nederland les vrijdag werk sneeuw stage thanksgiving familie campus december donderdag zaterdag vrienden feestje film studenten wedstrijd maand zondag club lessen januari jaar

Figure 1. Topic model

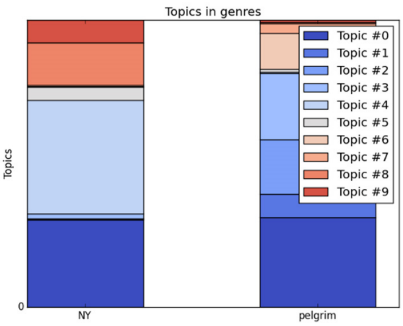

Figure 2. Topic weights

[164] The idea underlying the stacked bar chart is that each text has some proportion of its words associated with each topic. Because the model assumes that every word is associated with some topic, these proportions must add up to one. For example, in a three-topic model, text number 1 might have 50% of its words associated with topic 1, 25% with topic 2, and 25% with topic 3. The stacked bar chart represents each document as a bar broken into colored segments matching the associated proportions of each topic.

Before we continue with our analysis, it seems important to address an elephant in the room. One interesting theme conspicuous by its absence in the list of topics generated, pertains to the traditional difference in the degree of (religious) spirituality in both corpora. We might have expected pilgrims to use a significant amount of their words on the themes that traditionally characterize a serious pilgrim: reflection on God, the meaning of spirituality, or the exploration of the self. However, these themes are largely absent. Nouns referring to the more spiritual dimension of a pilgrim's journey are close to marginal: Santiago (3,112x), 'camino' (2,911x), '*kerk'* ('church', 2,160x) '*kathedraal*' ('cathedral', 1,391x). Words like God (298x), Jacobus (346x), '*religie*' ('religion', 26x) or '*spiritualiteit*' ('spirituality', 26x) seem similarly minor. This theme, which is traditionally seen as one of the main points of distinction between the two traveler types, does not seem to play an important role in the typology. (Munster and Niesten 2013; Collins-Kreiner 2010; Cohen 1979; Margry 2008)

Exploring parallel notions in different topics

As argued above, topics 2 and 4 provide us with pointers to contextualize different, but parallel notions in our two subcorpora. To get a better impression of what these topics look like, we created word clouds for the two topics, including the 30 most frequent words per topic.[165]

Figure 3. Word clouds of topic 2

Figure 4. Word clouds of topic 4

A first method is to manually identify, from these topics, those forms that seem to have the potential to construct pilgrim- or tourist-ness. Both contain mostly words related to the external manifestation of the journey. For tourists, these are pre-

[165] Word clouds are "visual presentations of a set of words, typically a set of tags, in which attributes of the text such as size, weight or color can be used to represent features (e.g., frequency) of the associated terms" (Havley and Keane, quoted in DePaolo and Wilkinson 2014: 3) The can be used "to summarize large amount of data in a meaningful and efficient way". (3) Data that is presenting in this form can more readily be interpreted by the viewer. This shows how this approach already provides us with much more interpretable topics. See also Smiciklas 2012; Fountas and Pinnell 2001.

dominantly sightseeing opportunities: 'central', 'times', and 'empire', but also 'hotel', 'metro'. For pilgrims, these external manifestations include parallel notions such as '*kathedraal*' ('cathedral'), 'santiago', '*Spanje*' ('Spain'), '*stad*' ('city'), 'albergue', '*herberg*' ('hostel'), 'km.'[166] Through a close reading of their original context, we can better understand the interpretation and significance of these parallel themes in the two corpora. Both topics show an interest in the places of interest during the journey. The clearest couple might be that of the church in the pilgrim corpus and the museum in the tourist corpus, for these concepts have certain things in common: they are both spaces that enjoy a high status and attract visitors, they are spaces in which reverence and reflection play an important role; they share their capacity for sublime historical experiences and, as such, are both potentially sacred spaces.

There are a couple of different ways in which pilgrims discuss churches. One recurring frame for churches along the Camino is their contribution to the scenery. Pilgrims often remark on church buildings as picturesque elements in the already impressive landscape, for example: 'The tower of a third church that has stood sometimes towering over the lake' or 'Along the way we drove under the remnants of a collapsed church.'

In these instances, they are a part of the overall impressions of the Camino, a dot on the horizon as the pilgrims continues on the way. For pilgrims, the landscape can be an important element of the journey (Frey 1998: 87-136), and it has since long been the object of study in the field of human geography (Stoddard and Morinis 1997; Bajc, Coleman and Eade 2007; Collins-Kreiner 2010). These studies have pointed out that pilgrims become "highly mindful of themselves and the surrounding environment" (Scriven 2012: 256). As they slowly walk along the road, the scenery is their constant companion and plays an important role in their daily experience. A beautiful environment can lift a pilgrim's spirits like nothing else ('It was a beautiful walk, another sunny day along a canal and nature reserve').

We find a similar framing of other words in the topic, like '*stad*' or '*kathedraal*' ('The arrival in Le Puy was very beautiful, you looked over the city and you saw the cathedral high on a mountain', or: 'Again, a stamp just as in epine just before Chalons, where suddenly a special cathedral appeared on the horizon'), or even 'Santiago':

> This is a suburb of Santiago de Compostela. On the border between the two places we stopped at the sign of Santiago de Compostela to take pictures. And then we went onward. Now we're in Santiago de Compostela. After some kilometers we reached a hill and we saw the Cathedral in the distance.

[166] We exclude the words 'new', 'york' and 'pelgrim/s' in this discussion for the obvious reason that their dominating presence is a result of their status as initial search words.

A presence of churches in the scenery almost always contributes to a favorable conception of the landscape, while a lack of churches is usually combined with landscapes involving industrial or other urban surroundings. Previous writings have attributed a preoccupation with landscapes to the realm of tourism, rather than pilgrimage (Gothoni 1998; Andriotis 2009). In her ethnographic study of pilgrims and tourists at two pilgrimage shrines in Greece, British geographer Victoria Della Dora writes that this interest functions as an important factor in the appropriation of a travel identity: "Most of my informants in Meteora defined themselves 'tourists' as opposed to 'pilgrims,' because, they claimed, they were there 'for the scenery,' rather than to pray" (2012: 967). On the Camino, it seems, the landscape is not seen as a distraction, but rather as contribution to the sacred pilgrim experience.

Another way in which churches are framed in pilgrim narratives is to pay attention to the religious tradition of the buildings, to understand them as architectural manifestations of the sacred nature of the Camino. In many of these instances, churches simultaneously become places of action; spatial invitations for sacred contemplation or rituals. Pilgrims do not merely look at them or pass by them, but also appropriate these churches by performing rituals within their walls. ('In Los Arcos we visited a beautiful church, Mary and I have been saying prayers with a group of Austrian elderly people', or: 'I understood that God for him implied a homecoming, every time when he entered a church. He then could move forward in two directions in his life, but in the church he learned what the right direction was'.)

In these examples, we can see how churches are not so much interesting for their architectural or historical value, but rather appreciated as opportunities to explore and *engage* with the sacred potentialities of the pilgrimage.[167] Entering a church is not the same as entering other buildings. This notion of the centrality of space in the direction of a sacred gaze is one that has gained dominance in the debate in religious studies during the last twenty to thirty years, known as the 'spatial turn' (Knott 2010). Famous in this debate is Jonathan Z. Smith' statement that "[s]acrality is, above all, a category of emplacement" (1992: 104). Smith argues that a sacred site such as a temple "serves as a focusing lens, establishing the possibility of significance by directing attention, by requiring the perception of difference. Within the temple, the ordinary (which to any outside eye or ear remains wholly ordinary) becomes significant, becomes 'sacred,' simply by being there" (Smith 1992: 104). Many pilgrims describe the encounter with churches in terms of this spatial shift in evaluation. It is especially noticeable in relation to social aspects, describing a sense of comradery or even love within their walls:

[167] It is somewhat surprising that pilgrims hardly ever remark upon the particular historical or cultural significance of these churches. Much has been written about the special architectural style that characterizes the churches along the Camino as a result of the specific political and cultural dynamics that has formed the North of Spain (Fernie 2008; Mullins 2014).

> I also went to the pilgrim mass there. Afterwards all pilgrims were called to the front and the priest raised his arms and a pilgrim prayer was called for. The church was filled with all sorts of pilgrims of all ages and nationalities. It moves you, when your group receives this kind of attention. A beautiful moment.

These experiences are also mentioned with regard to other words that occur in topic 2, for example '*kathedraal*': 'Then I went to the cathedral to stabbing the candle with the light I was carrying symbolically from Lourdes'.

Museums, like churches, have the potential to inspire a sense of awe and even spiritual reverence, due to their insistence upon cultural and historical depth and the celebration of aesthetic contemplation. John Falk pointed out that "[t]he museum can offer something akin to a reverential experience and a place of 'peace and fantasy' where the visitor can escape the mundane, work-a-day world" (Falk 2013: 46) In his work on the contemporary museum visitor, Falk argues that visitors cherish museums as places where physical and intellectual treasures are publicly accessible:

> Upon entering a museum, the visitor, in large part because of the expectation that great and important things are contained there, finds it awe-inspiring. [..] Museums are places where people can see and learn about things outside of their everyday lives - precious and unusual things; things of great historical, cultural or scientific import; things that inspire reverence. (Falk 2013: 189-190)

Yet, in the tourist narratives in our corpus, we have found very few expressions of these kinds of sentiments regarding museums. Mostly, museums are spoken of as almost mandatory stops for visitors of New York City. They are often talked about as one of the many familiar items on the to-do-list of tourists. ('The agreement went as follows: ascending the Empire State Building, visiting the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), Times Square at night, a dinner and then to the hotel,' or: 'Soon we will go to the Guggenheim museum. Yesterday and the day before we went to the Empire State building, the Brooklyn Bridge last, the Museum of Natural History seen (so BIG!!!!), Macy's (big disappointment) and saw Central Park and much more,' or: 'The next few days the program is filled with the Guggenheim Museum, the Empire State Building, a stand-up comedian show, maybe a musical, a few districts and possibly some shopping.')

Rarely ever do tourists spend a lot of words on their museum visits. There are no explanations concerning what they have seen there, nor how they experienced it, the other visitors they met, or the knowledge they gained. These museums serve as classical 'truth markers', which function to cement the bond of tourist and attraction "by elevating the information possessed by the tourist to privileged status" (MacCannell 1976: 138). They attest to the validity of the New York City trip, and are such well-known semiotic markers that there is no need to further elaborate on

them. In other words, they seem primarily part of the tourist's desire to authenticate such sights and inscribe themselves in the semiotic field of New York City. Through this inscription they become part of the field, which in its ubiquity within Western culture is not something that can be 'consumed' in the classic sense. The tourist disposition, in this sense, is a more modest one than theories of commodification usually allow for.

As one might deduce from the citations given above, other words that occur in topic 4 ('park', 'central', 'times', 'state', 'empire', 'bridge') are used similarly. Occasionally, visitors will give a short glimpse of their appreciation of the place and their experience there, such as: 'Then a bit of culture (well done right, Bear) in the Museum Of Modern Art (MoMA)', or: 'The Metropolitan and the Museum of Modern Art are highly recommended.' Other geographical words that we find in topic 4 can also fulfil this function:

> We went to Columbia University, Harlem, Central Park, Staten Island, and actually too many placed to mention. We also went to CBGB's, the temple of the hardcore music according to Joep … Actually, the walk across the Brooklyn Bridge at dusk was my favorite part. All the lights of the skyscrapers, and the red sky behind it, really great.

In these instances, tourists emphasize the cultural significance of the museums they have visited, which might be understood as a sign of a genuine impression that the experience has had on them, and/or as a way to consolidate the social capital of travel towards the people reading the blog. This last position is reinforced by the stance of expertise that they take after visiting a sight (as in the last example), in which sites are recommend to others without explaining why. This discourse mirrors the rapid succession of impressions (and inscriptions) inherent to tourism.

At this point, a first comparison between pilgrim and tourist narratives springs clearly to mind. In the writings of both types of travelers, the interaction with significant places and opportunities for cultural and historic sightseeing is key. Pilgrims use these as landmarks in a potentially meaningful environment or opportunities for lingering experiences, while tourists value them as non-specific cultural highlights to be encountered during a visit to the city. We can thus see a significant difference in the understanding of sights and sites in pilgrim and tourist discourses. While pilgrims are appropriating the sights they see by incorporating them into their own, personal story, tourists do not have to explain visiting the archetypical NYC sites. The reasons for doing so are constructed externally; the role of the tourist is not so much one of appropriation but one of inscription into the experiential 'package deal' of New York City.

Several other pointers in the corpora underscore this difference between tourists and pilgrims: the latter, for instance, usually talks of the experience in light of the teleological journey, while the tourist insists upon the cultural and

experiential extravagance of the isolated experience itself. Throughout the pilgrim blogs, 'Santiago' is used as a teleological point of reference that exists in the future tense ('Later in Santiago', 'Two weeks until Santiago', etc.). 'New York', by contrast, is often framed as a unique place of excitement that is being experienced in the present time ('Here in New York', 'I'm taking part in the nightlife of New York', 'Walking through NEW YORK, too weird', 'Jesus, New York is so big!!!!! It's crazy!!!'). There is a strong sense of awe in these tourists' exclamations, a near disbelief of their ability to inscribe themselves into the city of New York, the mediated city *par excellence* which they have known through imagery for so long. The high amount of lexical units such as capitalized words and exclamation marks further underscore this fervor. Such signifiers, which Crystal (2006: 255) has called 'Netspeak', exist in between spoken and written language. Pilgrims, conversely, seem less prone to use such exclamatory signifiers.

Other pointers found in topics 2 and 4 pertain to the notion of transportation. Both tourists and pilgrims combine the topic of significant sites with words relating to the process of getting there; for pilgrims these include: 'km', 'route', '*weg*' ('road'), 'meter', and for tourists: 'metro', 'bus'. When pilgrims use these words, they are often framed by ideas of continuity: every kilometer travelled is a contribution towards the overall project of walking to the pilgrim's destination. ('By now I've arrived 38 km from Leon, so tomorrow I pass the 600 km mark from Lourdes'). Tourists, however, seem to look upon travel as a necessary evil ('Around 22:30, we are totally fed up and we look for a subway that brings us back to our hotel around 23:30'), although some tourists describe a (small) sense of excitement in using such a 'New York-type' of transportation as the metro ('We toured around with the metro and stuff, in the metro (underground) there was a group of 10 people that started breakdancing!, they were crazy good :D').

The framing of the accommodation elucidates the same discrepancy between the ongoingness of the pilgrim's travel narrative and the tourist's discontinuous succession of experiences. Pilgrims, for instance, frame '*herberg*' ('hostel') as continuations of the Camino experience. They form the decor for a whole set of pilgrim adventures:

> It's festive, cosy and homely. Along with a handful of pilgrims we sit in the kitchen, talk, drink wine, while cooking and eating. It's delicious. I enjoy with my hands, feet, my head and everything else I have. When I lay my weary head on the kitchen table, I'm being massaged. It is miraculous. A bed with sheets, blankets, towels and much more in a hotel can't match a bare albergue jammed with wet and happy pilgrims.

Tourists, on the other hand, understand 'hotel' as the end of an adventure ('After that we walked around and arrived at our hotel again', 'We have walked around for a bit, drank a beer, and went back to the hotel'). Nothing happens at a hotel, except

for a good night's rest that ensures the tourist will be ready for the next day of sightseeing. In contrasts to '*herberg*', the word has a similar connotation in pilgrim narratives: those pilgrims that prefer the hotel over the albergue praise the cleanliness, solitude and opportunities for intense rest ('I'm having a day off in a hotel, two lovely nights in a bed and washing some stuff'). Furthermore, pilgrims often comment upon hotels as places for 'so-called pilgrims', pilgrims who do not dare to completely commit to the Camino and seek to enjoy the luxuries they know from their daily lives, rather than experience the whole Camino by sharing a table and a sleeping hall with other pilgrims (Frey 1998: 94-100).

By exploring the different approaches to parallel themes in their narratives, we have come to understand pilgrims as travelers that experience their journey as an ongoing flow towards a dot on the horizon, while tourists appreciate theirs as a series of extraordinary, discontinuous highlights.

Exploring differences in a compiled topic

One of the topics introduced above stands out by befitting both corpora in approximately the same degree. In topic 0 we find a set of words that play a large role in both the pilgrim and the tourist corpus; '*dag*' ('day'), '*mensen*' ('people'), '*uur*' ('hour'), etc. are all words that we have found on the top of the most used words in both type of traveler blogs. The word cloud of this topic looks as follows:

Figure 5. Word cloud of topic 0

The words gathered in topic 0 occur in both the tourist and the pilgrim corpus. In this topic we find many words that refer to the practical side of traveling. A quick look at the total word counts shows that these are by far the most frequent words in both corpora. In pilgrim narratives, the most used nouns are '*dag*' ('day', 7,517x), '*uur*' ('hour', 7,380x, 'km', 6,020x), followed by '*weg*' ('road', 4,712x) and 'route' (3,533x). Not only do these results point towards the pilgrim's tendency to focus upon practicalities in their narratives, the denotations of distance, such as 'km', 'meter', and 'route' are all indexical of a reflexive attitude when it comes to the

temporal and physical linearity of their trek. Tourists, too, use mostly words that refer to the practical aspects of their journey. After 'New' (17,752x) and 'York' (16,380x) – by far the most frequently used words for obvious reasons –, the nouns most used in tourist narratives are '*uur*' ('hour', 7,157x), '*dag*' ('day', 6,952x), '*mensen*' ('people', 4,576x), and '*tijd*' ('time', 4,537x). Most notably, the words '*uur*' and '*dag*' appear both in the joined topic 0 and in both the distinctive topics 2 and 4. When we consider these words within their original context, we might, again, get a clearer understanding of the meaning pilgrims and tourists attribute to these frequently used words.

The word '*dag*' ('day') is used in different ways by travelers. Both pilgrims and tourists often use the word in a diary-style fashion: when the day is at a close they reflect upon the way they have spent it. The following quotations might, for that matter, have been taken from either pilgrim or a tourist narratives: 'Today began as a sunny day again (tourist narrative)', 'In the local hotel I can stay overnight, it was a beautiful walk, another sunny day besides a canal and nature reservation (pilgrim narrative)', 'It was a super energizing but also very tiring day (tourist narrative)'.

There are, however, also some significant differences between the framing of '*dag*' in both corpora. Pilgrims tend to connect the word to a definite experience of repetitiveness: '*een dag uit het leven van een pelgrim*' ("a day out of the life of a pilgrim" Frey 1998: 226). They often remark that it might not be interesting to relate the day in too much detail, as such exposition would result in exactly the same story as the day before, and the day before that, and the day before that.[168] ('Yet another day with only asphalt,' or: 'Beautiful sunny weather, all day long'.) This points to a tension between the contents of pilgrim blogging and the blog format itself; *waarbenjij.nu* is set up to accommodate repeated entries.[169] Many bloggers on the platform, it turns out, write daily about their journey, and the hesitance explicated by pilgrims to share their daily routines is related to this necessity endemic to the blogging format to regularly create content. Yet the repetition, boring as it might appear to write or read about, also points towards one of the most valued attributes of the pilgrimage to Santiago. It forces the pilgrim into a state of stress-free, uncomplicated, non-hasty surrender.

Tourists, on the other hand, seem much less passive in the shaping of their days, nor do they value repetition or an uncomplicated day spent quietly. Rather, tourist narratives, as one might expect, are filled with plans and reports of all the opportunities that have been taken advantage of:

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[168] Pilgrims are also fond of numbering the day described, perhaps as way to not lose count amongst the monotony of the pilgrim life, or as a way to underline the teleological nature of their journey ('only 12 more days to go').

[169] We might partly attribute this to structural procedural components on the *waarbenjij.nu* platform, too: for instance, the website includes a window with 'recent travel stories' in the sidebar of all blog entries, including the dates of these stories. The platform thereby emphasises a form of chronology in which regular content creation is visually emphasised.

> The day afterwards we walked the park route; in the evening we were in bed around 22:00 … The next day we walked the skyscraper route and looked at the Chrysler building and the day after we have seen the skyline from the Empire State Building (=highest building of NY). Besides that we have spent 1 day shopping in Jersey Garden, we have visited the zoo, the botanic garden of Brooklyn and have been to the cinema twice (Bewitched and Mr. and Ms. Smith)

Tourists see every day they spend in New York City as precious, representing a set of possibilities that is, sadly, limited. Consequently, every day must be used and appreciated to the fullest. ('Next day we had to get up early, because everything had to be seen in one day of course!', 'In New York there're too few days'.) There are clear expressions of urgency in these vignettes, signified by the enumeration of experiences and the repeated metrified use of time. The excerpt above answers to the stereotypical image of the tourist as a hastily operating creature, but especially if we compare it to the pilgrim narrative, we can recognize an active and pointed disposition with regards to how time, which might be spent in many ways in such a large city, is chosen to be spent.

As we can see, the pilgrim's use of '*dag*' points towards the way in which a pilgrim looks upon that concept: as a cycle to be repeated after a measured amount of time. Within that time span, certain tasks need to be fulfilled: walk, eat, sleep, repeat, until the pilgrimage is completed. For the tourist, the notion of 'day' functions almost as a threat, as the regrettable promise that at one point, the excitement must end. This functional difference of temporality can also be distinguished in other time-related words that appear in both corpora, '*tijd*' ('time') and '*uur*' ('hour'). Especially that first term is put to use very differently by our two traveler types. Pilgrims often mention taking their time to wander. ('We're taking the time for this Spanish country,' 'When you walk alone (which I usually do), you think a lot--there's plenty of time for self-reflection,' 'Had a lot of time to think… was walking alone again for the whole day'.) This temporal experience is often cited as an important motivation for undertaking the pilgrimage to Santiago. The Australian cultural analyst Paul Genoni showed that 'it is the desire to live more intensely in the present, the now' (2011: 10) that can constitute one of the main objectives of pilgrims. Yet in their elongated and repetitive experiences of time, what constitutes Genonis 'now' becomes somewhat hard to answer. The series of punctual present moments as tourists explain it surely seems just as 'intense'. Living intensely in the present surely does not seem a feat of the pilgrim narrative alone. Further, beyond the 'now', pilgrims apply the notion of time in a historical sense, thinking of and envisioning earlier times as they pass by certain areas. ('You can imagine how it must have been in those days with carts and people', 'The villages and cities are often real gems where time has stood still.') This interest in the past is an effect of the ritual framing of the journey, which places the modern pilgrim into a historical tradition and connects contemporary pilgrims with their

predecessors. It has been argued that this nostalgic linking of the past and the contemporary pilgrim constitutes an important difference between the pilgrim and the tourist.[170]

Finally, pilgrims talk about time as part of their daily itinerary, having to arrive at a certain gite or albergue ('We were nicely on time in Bercianos del Real Camino'). Tourists, in the meantime, seem to be rapidly going about their day, experiencing time primarily as a pressure: they often indicate having little time at the places they visit, and even to write their stories. ('Today we are going to a museum (National History museum) and we also want to walk across Brooklyn Bridge but I don't think we still have time for that because must leave at 4 from the hostel to the airport. Ah well we shall see.' 'Damn, time is going fast.' 'We still have 3 weeks to go, but it seems we don't have enough time.' 'But hey, I'm not going to waste my time behind the internet, pictures and other stories you'll get to hear when I'm back home!') Tourists have limited time at their disposal and show a highly reflexive attitude towards that notion, which results in a high commitment during the days at their disposal. This awareness of the passing of time (cf. Dann 1999; Van Nuenen 2015) is a recurrent theme in tourist writings. What is important to add in this context is that, due to the limited time to spend in New York City, the journey gains a level of significance that determines the extraordinary nature of it a large degree.

In the discussion on the dichotomy between these two types, we often find that this difference is interpreted as a difference in commitment and therefore depth: the tourist only skims the city, while the pilgrim takes time and effort to engage deeply with the environment. However, from the analysis above, it becomes clear that tourists are impressed and moved by their experiences. Their intentions, emically speaking, are not so much shallow, but rather *condensed*: they wish to experience as much as possible in a very limited amount of time, and position themselves to be impressed by the multitude of possibilities the city offers. While the Camino offers pilgrims in-depth engagement with the journey through repetitiveness, New York City offers tourists a myriad of different highlights. Rather than understanding this difference between pilgrims and tourists in terms of depth or in religious terminology, we might try to understand the character of the relation to the trip.

[170] Genoni illustrates this argument with a citation from pilgrim writer Conrad Rudolph: "It is the deep and sustained integration of this dynamic of past and present along the pilgrimage routes that accounts for why the pilgrimage is not a vacation or tour but a journey, not a succession or postcard-worthy sites but a progression of time and space in which both the implicit denial and the embracing of time and space inherent in the acceptance of history operate" (Conrad Rudolph, cited in Genoni 2011: 166).

Conclusion

In the analysis we noted a shared interest with regards to sightseeing opportunities by both pilgrim and tourist. The differences in which these opportunities are approached and integrated in the narrative of the journey indicate differences between the traveler types.

For pilgrims, itinerant encounters are for a large part explicated as spontaneous, like a church that appears on the horizon, or a city discerned on the top of a mountain. Pilgrims explain these encounters as part of the overall landscape, appearing within the specific context of their personal journey. Yet, while this element of surprise is key, the experience as it is uttered is also a sustained one: pilgrims might walk an entire afternoon towards a church that they see looming from the top of a nearby hill. Their forms of engagement with their surroundings, in other words, are *embedded* in the larger conceptual scheme that they draw up about their personal story and the goal at hand. Conversely, the places visited by tourists are less embedded and their experience of these places is more discontinuous. A tourist chooses to visit several sites a day and hastens from one to the other. At the same time, these tourist experiences are more actively planned, and few things are left to coincidence. When one goes to NYC as a tourist, one knows what to expect – and that is precisely why the trip is valuable.

Interestingly, both pilgrims and tourists adopt a receiving attitude during their journey. Pilgrim narratives can be characterized by a sense of *Gelassenheit*, an existential sensibility to happenstance that has previously been connected to traveling instead of touring.[171] This attitude should not be confused for passivity: the significant places pilgrims happen upon are seen as opportunities for action and engagement. Pilgrims do not only look upon churches or cathedrals or walk past them, but often also stress their own personal experiences and ideas related to these places – thereby discursively appropriating the place, claiming it for themselves. For pilgrims, this form of spatial appropriation is often connected to the historical tradition of the places they encounter, the realization that many predecessors have stood there, and now becoming part of that tradition. This should not be seen as (only) a humble or lowly attitude, though: pilgrims are continually connecting places to their personal worlds.

In tourist narratives, the notion of surrender is much less peaceful; it stems from the realization that with a limited amount of time to spend in New York City, not every opportunity of the city can be seized. Therefore, the tourist typically gratifies her/himself by visiting only the most important or iconic places. Unlike pilgrims, tourists do not seek for a personal appropriation of the places they visit;

[171] This sense of freedom from the behest of time has often been connected to the discourse of adventure as opposed to that of tourism (cf. Simmel 1971; Redfoot 1984; Week 2012) Art critic László Földényi has written about the writings of famous Dutch travel author (and pilgrim) Cees Nooteboom: "the man who allows things that happen to him without wanting to intervene prematurely, is truly set free … becoming aware of the deeper cohesion that binds people" (1997: 113).

they do not claim their own space within the walls of the MoMa, or between the lights of Time Square. Rather, they seek to inscribe themselves in the semiotic field of New York City, to trace and consume the images they already know – but not to make them their own.[172]

A focus on both time and space is reminiscent of what Jerome Bruner (1986) has called the narrative understanding of thoughts and experiences, which concerns itself with storied wants, needs, and intentions, and seeks to locate these stories in time and space. Pilgrims share a focus on prolonged, continuous movement, which entails daily repetition while *exploring* both the environment and its sacred dimensions. This is related to the other dominant feat of the pilgrim: a position of *engagement* as an active, creative disposition, involving personal self-deployment and the appropriation of visited places and histories. By contrast, tourists show a high awareness of temporariness; their movement through time is one of immediacy and *instancy.* Their sightseeing can be characterized as a highly organized, fragmented, disconnected series of highlights. Meanwhile, they are *inscribing* themselves in culturally framed, iconic places.

As the idea of a strict dichotomy between tourists and pilgrims has not proven very useful over the years, the debate on the tourist and the pilgrim seems to have specialized itself in creating continuums in order to understand the relation between the two types of travellers (cf. MacCannel 1973; Cohen 1979; Morinis 1992; Mulder 1995; Collins-Kreiner 2010; Münsters and Niesten 2013; LeSueur 2015). While such essentialist frameworks cannot fully accommodate the breadth of both the discursive outings of pilgrims and tourists (especially in an age of superdiversity in which translocal flows of people have resulted in unprecedentedly complex and 'unscriptable' social formations; see e.g. Vertovec 2007; Blommaert 2013), a continuum of characteristics arguably can help in reorienting to the pilgrim/tourist distinction, while elucidating the 'scripts' of identity[173] as they function in the procedures and narratives on these blogging platforms. Therefore, we propose the following diagram based on our conclusions – a bottom-up derived heuristic tool that can be put to use for future analysis of pilgrim and tourist travel blogs:

[172] 'Capturing' a sight with a photograph, in that sense, is not the sense of appropriation we are referring to; taking a photo may result in owning the commoditized sight, but it lacks the connection to the personal narrative that the pilgrim tends to make. A good example might be the photo taken by pilgrims when they reach the cathedral in Santiago, which seems to fulfil the same role as a typical tourist picture but has significantly more personal baggage connected to it (it is not just proof of having been there, but of the entire challenging journey towards it).

[173] With 'scripts' we mean to imply both the human-computational assembly of procedures and discourses as they come to rise online (waarbenjij.nu has a specific layout, for instance) that co-produce social patterns, as well as a histrionic, Goffmanian dimension: the internet allows people to 'play' as tourists and pilgrims as much as fully relating to or internalising these roles.

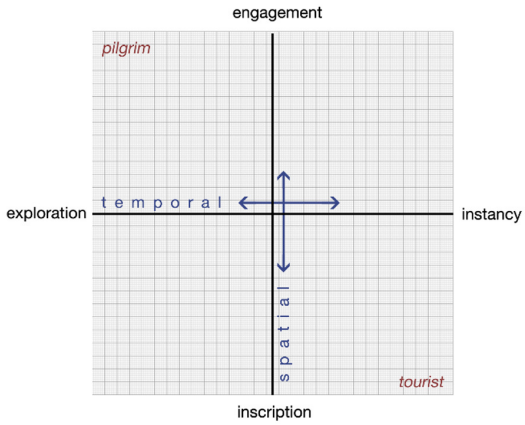

Figure 6. Characteristics of pilgrim and tourist narratives

As the diagram shows, the overarching, resonating components of pilgrim and tourist narratives might be distinguished by two experiential axes. Horizontally, the differentiation is facilitated by a temporal line – in that the distinction between the two types is based on an uttered experience of time. Vertically, the contrast has to do with the kinds of discursive appropriation of travelled space. This is a perspective of difference between tourists and pilgrims not in terms of their emic goals but in terms of their uttered discourse on an online travel writing platform, and it shows that the vectors of engagement that appear within those ecologies do not necessarily answer to the understanding of these traveler types within more conventional forms of travel writing. Further, both types of narratives need to be contextualized as responses to a computational ecology within which they are written and read.

By going beyond the recognition of detailed, superficial manifestations of both types of travelers, we have attempted to explore the distinction on the basis of two fundamental experiential categories: those of space and time. These two categories are not new to the debate, and have been applied to both the pilgrim and the tourist experience before (cf. Dann 1999; Rickly-Boyd 2009). What this diagram contributes to the debate is a suggested relation between them and an opportunity for applying them in the recognition of the pilgrim and tourist identity.

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4.3 *Interlude: Social procedures on travel platforms*

The current section has involved platforms, understood broadly as sites involving user-generated content and a strong integration with other apps or software, which allow for the construction of traveler identities. The platforms we have considered in the first paper of this section were sites for the production of locality, allowing its users to reach the Goffmanian backstage and meet the 'real locals'. These platforms can be thought of as providers of what MacCannell calls the "infinite regression of stage sets" (1976: 105) in which authenticity keeps shifting backwards, so to say, and in which ever more 'unspoiled' regions can be accessed. The second paper, a collaborative effort focusing on digital methods, dealt with a blogging platform where two different types of travelers were located and compared using distant reading tools. This allowed us to see the differences in discourses of experience, and to underscore that the identity construction of tourists and pilgrims involves different parameters than is often assumed – for one, the discourse of tourists involves a modesty of claiming space in the face of experiential possibilities that is often overlooked. Travel writing in both of these cases involves the construction of dichotomous forms of identity. Both the anti-tourist and the pilgrim are poised against the role of the tourist. Yet, there is a productive capacity in this binary construction, as it allows travelers to construct themselves in meaningful ways.

It may be repeated here that these types of identity are a form of enactment, play, and theatricality. The difference between the two papers in this section is that one deals with the self-expression of such identity (the 'tourist' or 'pilgrim'), and the other with the commercially delineated type of identity (the 'local' or 'insider'). To underscore the ways in which identities may be influenced by the platforms on which they are constructed, we can take a look at the semiotics of a related and widely influential peer-to-peer service: *Airbnb*. The lodging company has been advertising in 2016 with a slogan epitomizing the kinds of insider-ness under discussion here: 'Live There' (see Figure 1 and 2). More than a booking service, the platform here produces a very distinct kind of ideology about locality, homeliness, and belonging. Brian Chesky, *Airbnb* co-founder and CEO, said in in a statement: "The number one reason people chose to travel on Airbnb is they want to live like a local" (Airbnb 2015).

The inflation of 'living there', in this ad, is rendered quite effectively by the tweet that accompanied it on *Airbnb*'s Twitter feed. 'Living', then, becomes a matter of pure semiotics and play: one can *enact* living somewhere when one enters a local apartment, cooks a dinner, or does the laundry.

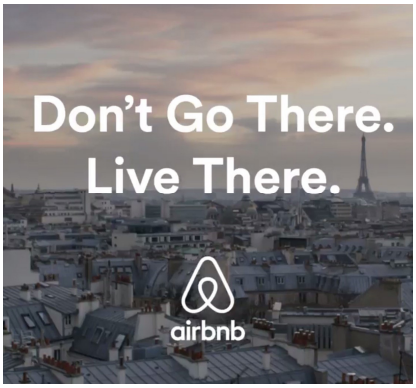

Figure 1. Airbnb Ad[174]

Figure 2. Airbnb tweet[175]

Yet, we may well add, there is an obvious phenomenological border that any tourist would need to cross in order to truly 'live there' and become a local or insider. In his multivoiced masterpiece *The Book of Disquiet* (1984), the Portuguese author Fernando Pessoa offers a mosaic of introspective, philosophical diary-like vignettes – many of which about his city of origin, Lisbon. Pessoa writes under one of his heteronyms, Bernardo Soares: he lives and works at the Rua dos Douradores in Lisbon. Outside work hours, Soares enjoys roaming Lisbon's streets, filled with people during the day but clearing out in the evening. He regularly dreams of escaping his boring, middle-class life. "In my dream I experienced freedom, as if the South Seas had offered me marvelous islands to be discovered" (1984: 98). Yet, the assistant bookkeeper simultaneously recognizes that it is the exact contrast between the magnitude of his dreams and his monotonous daily life that holds the highest value to him. Separating himself from his life, boring as it may be, would mean losing that life, "a partial death" (1984: 99).

Deep within his alienation towards the world and anxiety of freedom, Pessoa's protagonist realizes that he belongs in (and to) the city. The author shows us a specific meaning of the insider as an embodied, first person state of affairs. It means belonging in a certain place – which implies to be thoroughly bored and fed up by its constraints – but it also indicates that this boredom is the fertile ground on which one can start thinking about what it means to be 'home' creatively. The anti-touristic ideology, aiming to convert the tourist into a local, cannot tread beyond this frontier. Pessoa shows that local life carries with it monotony and repetition, which are diametrically opposed to the kind of experience that the tourist is looking for (that is, one that is stripped of both dullness and inconvenience). The discursive construction of locality remains in that sense always a reference to that which is not understood or

[174] See http://www.airbnb.com
[175] See https://twitter.com/Airbnb/status/722514957456113664

internalized yet; there is always more, always new material available to come even closer to the world of the local other.

Identity by comparison

To add to the previous papers, we may note that the platformed environments in this section did not function as contexts for 'travel writing' in any strict sense. That is, especially in the case of the narratival advertisements in the first paper, the process of writing this content is not necessarily the result of a typical authorial exercise. Looking at platforms allows us to see the edges of this activity, so to say, and to note that reading, writing, and executing are fundamentally related activities in online contexts. Many of the forms of travel writing we find there, upon closer inspection, are forms of execution, brought about by forms of reading. This can be explained by the medium-specific forms of persuasion and gamification that these travel platforms engage in, in order to mobilize and motivate their audiences. We may shortly consider some of these persuasive procedures here.

Many types of travel platforms can be found to make use of the social capital of travel (and its writing) to obtain content from their users. To clarify, we can look at travel network sites such as *TripAdvisor* (tripadvisor.com) or *Where Are You Now* (WAYN.com). These platforms are information providers leveraging user-generated content: they are set up for users to discover places to go to and connect with other travelers. The user is enticed to contribute through several, playful means. By means of introduction, however, we can consider a different kind of platform, namely a booking platform. *Booking.com*, perhaps most industriously of all examples on offer here, offers a host of 'conspicuous metrics' to visiting users that start popping up during the booking process, in order to convince these users to finalize the reservation (see Figure 3).

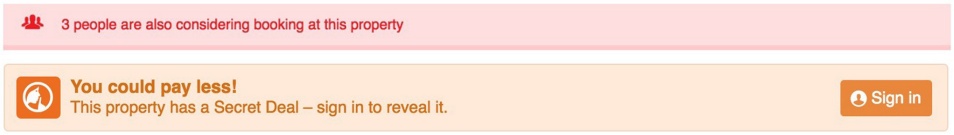

Figure 3. Booking.com warning messages[176]

What we see here is the rhetorical leveraging of the real-time dynamics of current-day travel platforms. Users are aware that they are visiting a translocal environment where thousands of others are also logged in at any time of the day. This awareness is then leveraged by the platform: it reminds its users that others are looking at the same

[176] This message appears when the user is about to book an accommodation but has not made the purchase yet.

webpage, and that those who are not logged in with their Booking.com profile may be paying more than those who are. These conspicuous metrics are a fundamental part of the attractiveness of this booking platform: reserving a hotel room, instead of a disembodied and secluded online activity, becomes infused again with vibrant and stirring social matters of the marketplace.

Now, we can add that these dynamics are not only part of the booking process: they are also leveraged on social platforms that deal in forms of 'travel writing'. When the user goes to the front page of a famous tourist city on *WAYN.com*, for instance, she is met with different graphs on its popularity—most notably, through a number showing how many people have visited the place, and how many people would still like to go (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. WAYN popularity metrics[177]

Further, the *WAYN* page shows an 'I've been there'-button (see Figure 5), which takes the user to a form where she can 'show off' that she has visited this place as well. Clicking this button influences a counter depicting the 'amount of countries visited' on the user profile page; it also generates a marker on the world map that the user can access, indicating all the countries she has visited.

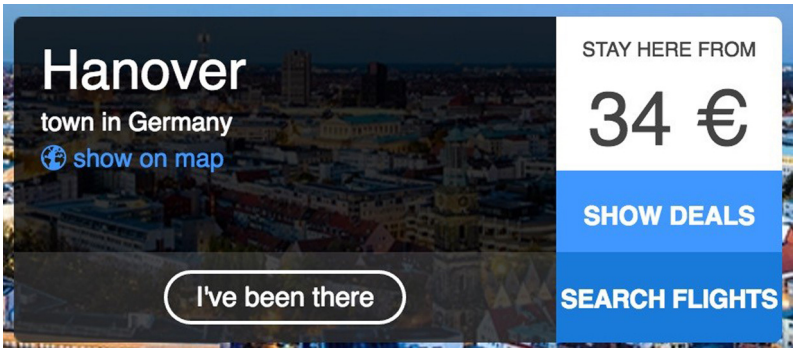

Figure 5. WAYN city header[178]

Further, if the user has entered her home address, she will regularly receive an email from the platform in which her opinion on that city is asked *via* another user. For instance, an email might read: 'Maria Cynthia wants your opinion on Tilburg.' Opening

[177] See http://www2.wayn.com/place/272261/germany-hanover; all sources were accessed June 12, 2016.
[178] See http://www2.wayn.com/place/272261/germany-hanover.

that email, then, shows a simple statement with yes/no buttons underneath (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. WAYN email (personal communication)

Through such reinforcements of the social capital of locality and insiderness, the user is incited to share information on the platform. Interestingly, these incitements also make use of ideas of authorship and audience that the user might have. *TripAdvisor*, for instance, sends its active users an email every few weeks. One of them asks: ‘Guess how many people have read your review?’ Opening the email shows a range of reader statistics relating to the user’s review (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. TripAdvisor email[179]

The email above notes that ‘it is time again for your monthly update’, reminds the user that their contributions are helping other travelers, and shows metrified information about the readership (i.e., the place they ‘come from’). Yet it is unclear whether these metrics derive from *TripAdvisor*’s knowledge about the hometown of these users (for

[179] Personal communication.

instance, by looking at their user profiles), or if they look at users' IP-addresses (which would allow one to see from which country a user is accessing the information). In the latter case, of course, it is hard to confirm whether these users actually 'come from' this or that city, or whether they are tourists looking up info from a locally connected computer.

Besides these reader metrics, which underscore that the reviews on *TripAdvisor* may be seen as unconventional forms of travel writing, there are metrics of pure gamification present. The user here received 100 'TripCollective points', which can also be tracked on the user profile page. Here, the user finds that these points lead to 'levels', another well-known metric from videogames (see Figure 8). These points, however, have no use beyond their gamified creation of incentive: *TripAdvisor* indicates on its 'Frequently Asked Questions' page that "TripCollective points do not have monetary value and cannot be redeemed for anything."[180]

Figure 8. TripAdvisor points[181]

Further, the platform's algorithm, based on the user's reviews, fills in another identity metric, namely the user's 'travel style'. This metric is shown through one or more keywords that appear on the profile page: the current author, for instance, has been attributed terms like 'history buff', 'urban explorer' and 'shopping fanatic'. What these keywords are based on, precisely, remains unclear. The traveler, in other words, is defined by algorithmic systems that make use of the ideology of precision and transparency, while remaining purposefully vague about the actual workings of the system. The operations behind these platforms – that what is presented as knowledge – is not transparent at all (or rather, we may ask who it is transparent *for*). Users must exercise some degree of 'magical thinking' ('it simply works!') if they are to be persuaded by these computational performances and sortations.

Like the process of writing, the process of reading these travel discourses is not necessarily a consciously directed effort. The information one can find on these platforms is organized within systems of 'dynamically generated pages': that is, webpages on which the server programmatically fills in certain details, based on the profile of the user. A simple example of a dynamically generated page is a web store that dynamically inserts user name details on a webpage, customizing it per user. As organizational frameworks, these webpages are not manually 'authored' for the visiting user, but

[180] See https://www.tripadvisor.com/TripCollectiveFAQ

[181] This gamified system is shown on a logged-in *TripAdvisor* user home page (as of June 2016).

programmatically put together (i.e., a form of heteromation). Both reading and writing, then, are always also matters of *executing* processes in the scripted environment.

Looking at the content on the peer-to-peer platforms – that is, the pages on which actual human writing is shared – we see that these are byte-size chunks of text produced by an author, who is always also part of the audience. The content, as we noted before, can be formalistically located somewhere in between the advertisement and the personal narrative. The advertisement pages on *Vayable*, for instance, are always accompanied by a personal biography of the host, and scrolling down further usually yields a series of post hoc experiences by the traveler. This is a dynamic resembling the professional travel blogs discussed earlier – but the kind of subject originating in platformed narratives is less distinct than the one emerging from the blogs. Even on the *Spotted by Locals* platform – which is most similar to the blog in that it comprises a retelling of experiences – the procedural makeup of these stories shifts away from the blogging format and towards the platformed format. It is, in these distributed, multi-user environments, increasingly about the persona, the procedurally delineated, functionally oriented role as 'insider' (and not the subject behind that role) that is the object and interface of interaction.

We may remind ourselves here what it means to speak of a *platformed* format. To move the attention of research to the platform instead of the website – see for instance Gillespie (2010) and Helmond (2015) – means to typify a significant change in how the web's infrastructure is put to use, especially by social networks services. In material-technical terms this relates to the separation of content and presentation with XML, the modularization of content and features with widgets, and the interfacing with databases through APIs. Economically, this serves to make external web data amenable for privately owned databases. As Gillespie (2010: 352) notes, the concept 'platform' brings into the fold different connotations, such as a foundational one (a platform is something to build upon), a political one (one can speak and be heard from a platform), and an architectural one (a platform facilitates expression in an egalitarian manner). Yet in its accommodating material form, platforms are first of all proprietary applied services, enable specifically formalized, monetizable and salable kinds of sociality and knowledge.

The main question for the subject, within the platformed ecology, becomes to what degree one succeeds in rendering and branding oneself as recognizable and distinctive. This is a matter of reduction, of pruning, and of emphasizing or even exaggerating one's selling points. Such behaviors are of course nothing new: Georg Simmel (2016 [1903]: 23) has made a relevant point when he noted:

> Das Leben wird ihr einerseits unendlich leicht gemacht, indem Anregungen, Interessen, Ausfüllungen von Zeit und Bewusstsein sich ihr von allen Seiten anbieten und sie wie in einem Strome tragen, in dem es kaum noch eigener Schwimmbewegungen bedarf. Andererseits aber setzt sich das Leben doch mehr und mehr aus diesen unpersönlichen Inhalten und Darbietungen zusammen, die die eigentlich

> persönlichen Färbungen und Unvergleichlichkeiten verdrängen wollen; so dass nun gerade, damit dieses Persönlichste sich rette, es ein Äußerstes an Eigenart und Besonderung aufbieten muss; es muss dieses übertreiben, um nur überhaupt noch hörbar, auch für sich selbst, zu werden.[182]

The individual self in late modernity, says Simmel, finds itself at risk as it increasingly relates to the world through pre-packaged, commoditized cultural elements. Consequently, it can only be understandably articulated – perhaps even to itself – by means of over-exaggeration. Simmel directs our attention to the transformation of representations into a comparable commodity, the economic rationale in which the self is situated, and the consequences of branding that follow. Han, noting a similar point, writes that identities have to become 'iconic' in order to accrue exposition value (2012: 25): one needs to attain a certain iconicity in order to have a recognizable identity.

Travel writing and reading, in this context, become part of extended programmatological systems of comparison. Similarly, the type of identities fostered within those systems are, arguably, a matter of ratiocination – that is, they are defined and delineated by their *function*, respectively as advertisers and as consumers of said advertisements. In terms of their social effects, the primary social effect of these comparative platforms, through an illusion of unmitigated and debureaucratized contact between host and guest, is an unprecedented degree of availability that is required of the host: an increasing pressure to maintain posture, to maximize the ease of the interaction, to make sure that the transaction is as straightforward and positive as possible. The loss, in the sphere of tourism, is then perhaps a loss of inconvenience, of discomfort, of uneasy social situations that would allow host and guest to experience kinship and reciprocity over their shared position as participants in the system of tourism, and any of the bureaucratic mishaps that might accompany it.

Suggestion for further research: Sentiment analysis

The driving out of inconvenience and the ideology of positivity might, in further research, be corroborated through computational means – for instance, by looking at the sentiments of user reviews. While a proper sentiment analysis is outside the scope

[182] "From one angle life is made infinitely more easy in the sense that stimulations, interests, and the taking up of time and attention, present themselves from all sides and carry it in a stream which scarcely requires any individual efforts for its ongoing. But from another angle, life is composed more and more of these impersonal cultural elements and existing goods and values which seek to suppress peculiar personal interests and incomparabilities. As a result, in order that this most personal element be saved, extremities and peculiarities and individualizations must be produced and they must be over-exaggerated merely to be brought into the awareness even of the individual himself" (Simmel 2002 [1903]: 19).

of this research, a few first indications may prove interesting.[183] The sentiment analysis software yields two variables: the type of sentiment that was found (positive, negative or neutral), and the certainty with which the algorithm has determined the sentiment (in percentages). If we look at a random sample of reviews left behind by users of *Vayable*, for instance, we see that the overwhelming majority of the reviews is positive in tone (19 texts with a negative sentiment, N=360). If we compare this to a similar sentiment analysis of a sample of our corpus of professional travel blogs (N=358), we see that 45 instances are negative. We may then normalize the sentiments: to do so, we multiply the computed certainty of every negative sentiment with -1, and the certainty of every positive sentiment with 1. Finally, we add up the numbers of all the sentiments and divide them by that total number. We can then place our two corpora on a scale of -100 to 100, and we see that the average sentiment for the blogs is rated at 73, while that of the platform reviews is rated at 86. While both are significantly positive – answering to the postulate that discourses of tourism are characterized by positive language (Dann 1996) – the user reviews score even higher: 'great' is the second most-used word in the corpus, and a close reading of some of these instances demonstrates that the process of reviewing may become a raising of the bid of positivity: each review is more glowing, more affirmative than the other. To give a small indication: one reviewer notes that

> Running Experience in Paris Jogging/biking with Andre during sunset in Paris was simply phenomenal. Not only is he generous, he will completely adapt to your pace, listen to your every needs [sic], and in addition to that appropriately give you an eye-opening account of the history and heritage that this city has to offer.[184]

The theme of 'going beyond the call of duty' emerges in many of the reviews; it is part of the field of expectations with regards to these types of touristic interactions. The development of peer-to-peer adhocracy, put differently, may involve the development of a moral code of conduct. There seems to be an ideology of intimacy running through these stories, which is paradoxically founded on the platformed logic of unadulterated *professional* contact. Interactions brought about amidst the fluidity of platforms and interfaces bring about a demand on the individual that appears more stringent than those in the bureaucratic environments that characterized tourism in the 20th century. Individuals, under this logic, are led to interact with one another as seamlessly in meatspace as they do in virtual space. The social and psychological implications of this professional ideology of intimacy seem well-suited phenomena for further research.

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[183] A simple, open-source sentiment analysis API was used for this analysis: see https://market.mashape.com/ vivekn/sentiment-3. The package uses a probability model built on a prelabeled test set of IMDb movie reviews, which is less reliable than a custom trained dataset. Through manual investigation of the tool's results it was found, however, that the package produces relatively reliable outcomes when dealing with blogs and peer-to-peer advertisements and reviews.

[184] See https://www.vayable.com/experiences/7373-running-experience-in-paris

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CHAPTER 5

Games

5.1 Playing the anti-tourist in Assassin's Creed

Tom van Nuenen (under review). Playing the anti-tourist in Assassin's Creed. *Space and Culture*.

Introduction

In 2008, after the city's population dropped below 60,000, residents of Venice staged a 'funeral' for the city, involving a three-gondola cortège carrying a red casket through the city's canals. The goal was to raise awareness about the city's population decline: day-trippers now outnumber the locals, as the growing lack of jobs outside the tourism sector and rising housing prices have been driving Venetians away for over a decade.[185] Venice, in short, is a tourist city. On the TripAdvisor page of an arbitrary gondola ride we can find familiar forms of criticism about the social repercussions of the overtoured city. The canals are brown and dirty; the rides are shorter than advertised; the gondeliers talk too loudly. One user, tellingly, writes: "I thought the people running the rides were quite rude. I almost felt like they had contempt for the tourists."[186]

Most of us are familiar with these stereotypical, to-be-expected inconveniences of mass tourism. They are 'part of the deal'. But seeing Venice through physical approximation is only one option of mobility. One can also switch on the console or PC and engage in something of a virtual tour of the Italian city. A popular meme, surfacing in 2013, showed the unlikely image of a couple of grandparents playing *Assassin's Creed 2*, simply rowing around in a gondola (see Figure 1).

The user's grandparents are portrayed here as the unlikely players of a popular and (when played straightforwardly) rather violent videogame. It reveals that the game serves another goal as well: that of virtual tourism.

[185] See for instance http://www.newsweek.com/why-are-venetians-fleeing-venice-76751. All websites were accessed April 12, 2016.

[186] See https://www.tripadvisor.com.au/ShowUserReviews-g187870-d4224219-r252519362-Ente_Gondola - Venice_Veneto.html#or24.

Figure 1. Assassin's Creed gondola meme (http://memeblender.com/2013/06/28/grandparents-row-gondola-through-venice-in-assassins-creed-2/, accessed April 12, 2016)

Assassin's Creed is a series of action-adventure video games published by Ubisoft. With 'history is our playground' as its official tagline, the series provides a remarkable amalgam of historical tourism, action-adventure gaming tropes, and a Dan Brown-esque narrative. Each iteration of the series attaches to an overarching story about a battle between assassins and templars as it unfolds through history: the player assumes the role of an assassin, and is set loose in a semi-accurate and 'open world' rendition of some historic city-, land-, or seascape. The game also includes historical characters in each of its iterations, ranging from Leonardo Da Vinci to Karl Marx, who are fictionalized to fit the game's fantastical narrative. This article will not divulge on this narrative, or on the representation of its historical characters (Marx, for instance, suggests at one point to the player they light a factory on fire). Rather, the emphasis lies on the touristic modes, figures and stories present in the series. The series is fit for an interdisciplinary analysis: one can find 'Assassin's Creed pilgrimages' on travel forums such as *TripAdvisor*[187], as well as YouTube comparisons between tourist sites as they are rendered both inside the game and outside of it.[188] One photographer, Damien Hypolite, produced a series of pictures on which printed screenshots of the game's representation are matched up with the physical space represented in them.[189]

It is this thread of gaming *as* tourism, and tourism as gaming, that is picked up in the current article. Play, as Alexander Galloway notes, is often a symbolic stand-in for larger issues in culture (Galloway 2006: 16). The current goal, similarly, is to understand play of *Assassin's Creed* as a sociospatial and chronotopical practice,

[187] See https://www.tripadvisor.com.au/ShowUserReviews-g187895-d2181488-r181628319-Guided_Tour _of _ Florence-Florence_Tuscany.html

[188] See, for instance, an official marketing video of *Assassin's Creed: Unity* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EaA7i8C9194), in which a series of picturesque shots from Paris is shown, alternating between the game space and physical space.

[189] See http://tidamz.tumblr.com/

and a procedural reenactment of anti-tourist attitudes. The article will restrict itself to home console entries in the series (see Figure 2 for an overview of the games and the places that are represented in them).

Looking at this list alone shows the breadth of historical cities that the series has reconstructed. Within these cities, most attention is typically given to the tourist hotspots; the creators took liberties with every entry in the series to accommodate either their programmers or the general public. The Roman Colosseum in *Assassin's Creed II*, for instance, has a circular rather than an elliptical shape, as rendering elliptical shadows would have been significantly more difficult.[190] In order to give the game a more recognizable visual appeal, the architecture of *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood* is that of the late 16th century Baroque period, while taking place in the beginning of the century. Noting these anachronisms and distortions, Douglas Dow picks up Jean Baudrillard's theory in which simulations precede reality, to argue that despite its immersive and realistic environments, *Assassin's Creed II* should still be seen as "a simulacrum, a version of the city that purports to be a true representation of Florence, but that presents a false likeness instead" (Dow 2013: 219). Such alterations are not easily spotted by the untrained eye, however, and as such confuse or remain unnoticed by the spectator, while leaving the historical accuracy of the tourist site in question (ibid.: 220). Dow presents the immersive simulation as something co-constructed through virtual environments and their historical veracity. Yet immersion is also a social effect, not just about historical veracity but also about the recognizability of the things one does and sees within that context. Looking at the types of virtual movement that this game series enables, and the narrative it offers, can be helpful to understand the societal mechanics it represents.

Game	Major place(s) visited
Assassin's Creed	Jerusalem, Acre, Damascus
Assassin's Creed II	Florence, Venice
Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood	Rome
Assassin's Creed: Revelations	Constantinople
Assassin's Creed III	Boston
Assassin's Creed: Black Flag	Havana, Nassau, Kingston
Assassin's Creed: Unity	Paris
Assassin's Creed: Syndicate	London

Figure 2. Assassin's Creed games and represented places

[190] See http://www.livescience.com/8945-renaissance-scholar-helps-build-virtual-rome.html

Games as chronotopical practices

Sybille Lammes (2008), in this journal, has followed Johan Huizinga and Bruno Latour to emphasize that games can be considered as sociospatial practices. The experience of game space, she notes, can be best conceived as both separate from daily life and as being part of it. To do so, she borrows Johan Huizinga's notion of the magic circle – the confined game space that allows for altering identity – and refracts it through Bruno Latour's concept of the social as an ever-changing network or web in which nodes create associations. Lammes suggests that games should be considered through a hybrid model, a series of 'magic nodes', in order to be appreciated for the experiential intensity they foster, as well as the enchantment that 'entering' a game world entails. "As such, digital games offer us playgrounds, where gamers can find an intensified space to express, and give meaning to, spatial regimes and spatial confusions that are part of our daily life" (Lammes 2008: 264).

Moving from here, we can add that these spatial regimes that the player engages in are not merely couched in the 'real time' of the immediate present (more on this aspect later), but also in historical time. The latter two terms are Bakhtin's, and through him we can raise the point that games like *Assassin's Creed* offer an organizing principle in their spatiotemporal enactment: that of the chronotope (Bakhtin 1981). While the chronotope, like many other Bakhtinian concepts, has emerged as an immensely productive tool in literary research, the term is still relatively unfamiliar in the field of game studies (but see Guschwan [2014] for one example). Yet the chronotope's analytical affordances are noteworthy for our purposes: the concept implicates the "intrinsic connectedness between space and time" (Bakhtin 1981: 84), and this configuration is of great importance to the construction of fictional worlds, as it accommodates the type of story that might be told within them.

In Bakhtin's famous words, "[t]ime, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (1981: 84). Bakhtin's attention to the physical properties of timespace is telling: more than a formal element, the chronotope is a lived, experienced, and practiced narrative force. This is of acute relevance to the player experience of game space, where time and space congeal through the act of embodied play. This is yet further complicated by the convergence of the body of player and avatar: both become part of the same phenomenological compound. Instead of knowing the avatarial body through visual perception alone, players are aware of themselves *as* avatars through their corporeal-locomotive actions (Nørgård 2011: 6). By extent, the space-times in which both player and avatar are situated are fused as well. This adds another dimension to what Bakhtin himself has noted in the 'Concluding Remarks' of his chronotopical work: namely, that chronotopes are polysemic and may signify different potentially conflicting motifs within a story that co-determine the work's overall structure (Bakhtin 1981: 252; cf. Borghart et

al. 2010: 6). The chronotopical contexts of both avatar and player are interlinked in the act of play.

How is a chronotope performed in video game play? Firstly, it involves the spatial environment itself, which as we saw is a simulacrum of well-known tourist places. As Dow notes, this falsely reinforces the ideology that in the offline world, these sites are 'the real thing', while they (much like the Los Angeles that Baudrillard described) are a staged, fictional image as well (Dow 2013: 224). Secondly, to reiterate, space is also a procedural enactment – that is to say, it arises through systems of locomotive gameplay, as well as the avatarial relationship to the environment that is propagated by a game. In *Assassin's Creed*, the avatarial movement seems a difficult fit for the historical framework of its represented content: as a free-running assassin, the locomotive mechanics of the game are predominantly the kind of kinetic power fantasy that dominates most modern 3D action-adventure games. While some entries in the series do provide a 'historical' mode of transportation, such as the horse carts in *Assassin's Creed: Syndicate*, the overriding type of locomotion in the game is still that of an a-historical superhuman. What this implies, in terms of chronotopes, is that *Assassin's Creed* intersects two spatio-temporal imaginaries – the fictionalized historical site and the equally fictional contemporary tourist site – and embeds an idealized form of movement of the player-character[191] within that environment.

In Bakhtin's theory, the reader engages with the chronotope only when their 'literary imagination' becomes involved; in other words, "when [the chronotope] shows something, when it brings to mind an image that can be observed by the mind's eye" (Keunen 2010). Crucially, in gaming, the experience unfolds not just as an imaginative reconstruction but in lived time – which Bakhtin calls "real time". That is, the game's graphics are processed and rendered on the spot, and the player's responses to what they see unfolds in real-time as well: their manual control should be immediate, with as little input latency[192] as possible. This means that literary imagination, for our purposes, might be replaced with 'procedural imagination', referring to the aesthetic experience arising from ludic, procedural systems of gameplay, representing space and time.

Assassin's Creed as touristic locomotion

The first thing to note is the type of game space that is constructed in *Assassin's Creed*, and the types of locomotion it allows for. This means to divert attention away from the game's overt combat mechanics, and instead regard its accommo-

[191] The hyphen here indicates a synchronicity between player and character; I follow Nørgard (2011) in emphasizing their phenomenological overlap.

[192] Latency can be defined as the time delay between the cause and the effect of some physical change in the system that is being observed.

dated types of movement as a primary function of power that the player has over the environment. *Assassin's Creed* can be placed under the moniker of *open world* or *sandbox* games, which are connected to a set of spatial mechanisms. The player-character in a sandbox game is 'set loose' in the virtual space and can roam around a delineated playing field (semi-) freely, instead of moving through a relatively fixed and more tightly scripted space.[193] Sandbox games typically share a lower amount of 'invisible walls' or loading screens compared to their linear counterparts. Further, their players are given a larger degree of freedom in regards to how to approach game objectives. Open world games might thus be considered closer to a simulated reality – but such a reading, as well as the emphasis on player freedom, is misleading, primarily because the kinds of gameplay fostered by an open game space are constrained nonetheless.[194]

On the surface level and amid the virtual crowds, *Assassin's Creed* embeds a number of touristic dynamics. This firstly involves the narrative position of the player-character as Other. In most of the series' games, the protagonist that the player inhabits is an outsider to the city, visiting in order to assassinate multiple enemies. There are obvious ontological discrepancies between player and avatar – notably, the protagonist a fleshed-out character in a cinematic narrative, instead of a silent and featureless vessel for the player to inhabit – but player and avatar still have an important thing in common, which is their tourist gaze (Urry 2011). That is, *Assassin's Creed* offers the anachronism of extrapolating this tourist gaze to an often pre-modern context. The avatar is often 'shown around' the city by a knowledgeable local,[195] and several trailers to the series' games mirror tourist advertisements.[196] This is a common process in virtual worlds, which have for decades now been presented and experienced as exotic travel destinations for 'online tourists', making extensive uses of metaphors and imagery from travel and tourism, as well as incorporating in their virtual world things like tourist kiosks, billboards, and other signifiers (Book 2003: 2).

Secondly, the player-character is tasked with missions focused on hospitality and tourism, becoming something of a 'local' in the process. In *Assassin's Creed II*, an important side-mission consists of funding the renovation of the protagonist's hometown, Monteriggioni, through purchasing and upgrading shops, houses and sites. Owning these properties has the advantage to the player of gaining passive

[193] Such linear movement we can find, for instance, in otherwise comparable action-adventure games like the *Gears of War* series.

[194] We might say that the more freedom a player has, the more problematic the instances become in which this freedom does not carry over: for instance, if one can roam about a city freely, not being able to jump over a fence or enter a building may seem superlatively estranging.

[195] In *Assassin's Creed II*, for instance, the protagonist is shown around Renaissance Venice, together with Leonardo da Vinci, past San Giacorno di Rialto and the Palazzo della Seta. In *Assassin's Creed: Syndicate,* the protagonists are shown around 1800s London, running into an 'odd-looking' Charles Dickens (dixit the protagonist) in the process.

[196] See for instance https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uC-FSEdPW-c

income, as once the town is refurbished tourists start visiting and spending money there.

Thirdly, there is a spatial gameplay element to be noted: the map. Sybille Lammes talks about environments in top-down strategy games like *Civilization* or *Age of Empires* as spaces that "have to be explored, claimed, and mastered", as the player is asked to "delineate, appropriate, and colonize environments" (Lammes 2008: 266). She refers thereby to the exploration of the map, which in these games start off as a blacked out 'terra incognita' that has to be traversed by the player in order to be revealed. While *Assassin's Creed* is of a different genre altogether, Lammes' point resonates. All of these games embed maps in their interface, which are copiously filled with points of interest, side-quests and treasures. Figure 3 shows the map of *Assassin's Creed: Unity*, taking place in Paris:

Figure 3. *Assassin's Creed: Unity,* map icons. See http://www.forbes.com/sites/insertcoin/2014/11/12/congratulations-ubisoft-youre-the-new-ea/#b061f0254625, accessed April 12, 2016.

Navigating through virtual space is thus, as Lammes rightfully points out, also always an issue of mapping, and the cities rendered in *Assassin's Creed* are always partly mediated through the 'minimap' in the corner of the player's screen, showing how to get to nearby places where a mission or side-quest[197] may take place. These side-quests, in a way, are more important than the main storyline, constantly communicated to the player on the map, and time-wise constituting the vast majority of the time to be spent in-game. Interestingly, the game's developer,

[197] A side-quest is an optional objective that the player may follow. Such quests often encompass a self-enclosed narrative thread, which is used to provide non-linearity to the player in the otherwise linear narrative of the game.

Ubisoft, has in the last years released a number of other highly popular games that follow a similar gameplay script involving an open world that is accessed via intense mapping practices – examples are the *Far Cry* series, *Watch Dogs*, and *Tom Clancy's The Division*.

This continuous spatial specification is further substantiated through augmented reality features on the screen: the game's user interface, for instance, shows pointers to targets that the player has selected on the map, noting how far the player is removed from the target, its name, et cetera. This works concomitantly with the mapping feature, as space is defined in terms of a measure of distance (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. *Assassin's Creed: Syndicate*, augmented reality features (412m to target). See http://www.wired.co.uk/news/archive/2015-07/21/assassins-creed-new-gameplay-features-video, accessed April 12, 2016

Lammes notes that the kinds of maps we find on modern screens are interactive and co-produced by their users, who can "modify trajectories, dimensions, markers, and cartographical appearances" (Lammes 2008: 269). She goes on to offset these maps from their historical predecessors: these, she argues, offered closed and fixed representations and perspectives, often serving particular ideological needs (think only of the central position of Europe on its world maps). Yet as we can plainly see, the use of maps in *Assassin's Creed*, interactive as they may be, is anything if not ideological: in fact, we may understand it as a touristic logic of space that entirely befits the historical regions that are being visited. These procedural chronotopes are

accommodating acute and continuous entertainment, and foster a state of psychological *flow* (Csíkszentmihályi 2009) – there is, as in many a touristic exercise, 'something to do around every corner.' The player-character moves across a map that is constructed for 'ticking off' its dots and areas, and ends up clean and emptied out after all of the quests have been completed.

Further, Lammes takes note of the birds-eye perspective that characterizes the strategy-games she is interested in: the player, in these games, does not act out of a mode of "individual experience" but takes on the role of a "cartographer on tour" (Lammers 2008: 267). It is this view from above, associated with the gods,[198] which to Lammes constitutes the player's claim to space. A similar point can be noted in the realm of tourism: Giannitrapani (2010: 51) analyzes the different predefined types of gazes that travel guides offer, and distinguishes between the partial or global gaze. The former pertains to a horizontal line, and involves the personal relationship between the gazer and the tourist space. The 'topographic gaze', which is systemic, unfolds primarily along a vertical line and is based on the strategy of the map (cf. Francesconi 2014). As a static approach, it conceptualizes the tourist location as an abstracted and, to the tourist, impersonal space. *Assassin's Creed*, as a form of touristic play, negotiates between these two spatial orientations. The player-character can claim certain areas of the city in an archetypical phallic fashion: by climbing to the top of a region's tallest building. Towering above the city results in a panoramic view, fully depersonalizing the city and turning it into an object of spatial possibility (see Figure 4). The player-character can then at once return to the partial, touristic gaze through what is perhaps the series' most iconic moment: leaping off the tall building into a conveniently placed haystack, accompanied by the sound of a screeching eagle.

Tourism / anti-tourism

We ought to note that the aforementioned form of locomotion is not simply touristic: it also provides for what in tourism studies is sometimes called an anti-touristic sentiment. The anti-tourist is an identity concept that arises amidst the social relations in modern tourism: it revolves around the desire to be "separated from the perceived commonalities of crowds" (McWha et al. 2015; see Pearce 1982; Buzard 1993; Dann 1999, 2012). Anti-tourists are typically characterized by an aversion to the superficial experiences that are associated with traditional tourism (see, e.g. Fussell 1982; Porter 1991; McCabe 2005; Week 2012). This is not to say that the anti-tourist comprises any distinct class of tourist: the very 'language of tourism' is one of sentiments about distancing oneself from the other tourists (Dann 1999: 160; see also Culler 1990: 3), and the movement 'above and beyond'

[198] Unsurprisingly, the genre of 'god games' are, in terms of their top-down representation, close to the ones Lammes depicts.

the perspective of the tourist in *Assassin's Creed* is a fitting first example of how the game proceduralizes such paradoxical anti-touristic behavior.

The series' stealth mechanics form a further means to distinguish the player-character from their surroundings. As the titular assassin, the player is required to sneak up on enemies and move through the city undetected: the game's procedural loop consists of assassinating targets followed by an escape sequence in which pursuers have to be evaded by making use of the city's infrastructure. This can mean escaping the city streets by climbing on roofs, hiding in the aforementioned haystacks, or moving surreptitiously among a group of citizens, rendering the player-character invisible to the guards. Locals, in these dynamics, are part of a nameless crowd unilaterally accessed through play, and their presence is commensurate to their capacity to assist or stand in the way of the solipsistic endeavors of the player-character. This is underscored by the game's narrative, in which the historical scenarios that are played out are a virtual reality, too. The framing device for the game's historical tourism is formed by a fictional technological device developed in the 21st century, the 'animus', which allows someone to enter a virtual reality constructed from the memories of one's long dead ancestors. The game thus effectively applies *mise en abyme*, and the historical environment the player-character enters is graphically 'assembled' at the start of every new scene to remind the player of this fact. Further, the use of VR as a narrative device offers a diegetic reason for certain gameplay elements, such as life bar, a notoriety bar, and lit-up target areas. Players are encouraged to interact with these virtual environments in imaginative ways (cf. Dow 2013).

Returning to Bakhtin with the previous in mind, we see that it is the temporality of action, in the context of virtual and approximated historicity, which constitutes the aesthetic experience of the player. As Bakhtin notes, the experience of duration, or "lived time", is central to the chronotope (in Keunen 2010: 40). Based on the previous findings, we can note then that there is an asymmetrical relationship between the represented chronotope and the representation *of* the chronotope. *Assassin's Creed* offers a condensed experience in that the game space represents only specific streets and sights of a historical city – its touristic *eidos* – and the duration of traversing that space is cut short in a myriad of ways.

At first glance, *Assassin's Creed*'s chronotopical relation to the past – embodied by the player-character as the involved but simultaneously excluded and rebellious observer, the privileged city dweller who moves fluidly both *through* and *past* the crowds – brings to mind Walter Benjamin's figure of the flâneur, strolling under the arcades of the modern city to see its many spectacles, its buildings, and its inventions. As Simon notes, this is certainly not a new connection: it is rather evident to distill games as a form of cyberspatial flânerie (or indeed, its late modern corollary of tourism) in that they both involve the gaze of a privileged, mobile class of libidinous pleasure seekers. "Like a tourist visit to Club Med, the gamer owes

nothing to the source of the representations that satisfy his desire" (Simon 2006: 63).[199]

This perspective, however, means to set player and avatar apart again: a focus on the chronotope shows that the player-character is never completely disconnected from the game space she traverses. Moreover, it does not account for the anti-touristic locomotive capacity of the player-character that characterizes *Assassin's Creed*. As a tourist, one acquiesces into giving up degrees of freedom and personal space. One waits in lines and has to get used to walking in the frame of other tourist's pictures. Yet the faux-historical environments in the game are quite literally designed to accommodate the player's locomotive abilities, which involve free running and parkour.[200] The game's city-, land-, and seascapes are littered with architectural signifiers: arcades, chimneys, aprons, branches, arches, finger pockets, edges, balconets – all are 'tells' to the player-character and construct the city-as-playground. Further, many of the series' iterations involve the player entering iconic churches, cathedrals and other buildings: in these spaces, a specific parkour path is set out as a type of puzzle, where the player has to find out which route to take to the goal. A tactual dimension comes into play here, as the free running gameplay is of course only enabled through certain controller input. Players set their avatars in motion through what Nørgård calls "handsight"; that is, they navigate the operation of vision through their hands (2011: 7). In *Assassin's Creed*, pressing down one single button – typically, the right trigger on console controllers – and moving the control stick in the direction one wants to go, activates the 'free run mode', which means the avatar automatically scales buildings, jumps between building roofs or pushes away obstructing people.[201] The handsight involved in this wide range of movements is notably simplistic, a 'holding down' of the right index finger (the trigger is typically used in racing games to accelerate, and in first-person shooters to fire the weapon), which here triggers an all-purpose mode of locomotion that allows the player-character to continuously thrust forward. In fact, most of the architecture in the game constitutes an expressive mechanism, rather than an obstacle. Game scholar Ian Bogost notes about free-running mechanics: "like the skate-boarder, the free runner sees the world differently, as a set of affordances for previously unintended means of locomotion" (Bogost 2015: 74). This alternative locomotion through the city involves an effortless continuity, Bogost notes, and its successful operation produces a sense of physical mastery for the player.

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[199] Yet to only focus on tourists and players as nodes of power, however much merit may reside in that perspective, would be to tell an incomplete story. The two types are also similar in their insecurity: Bogost emphasizes the player's anxiety about what the simulation they engage in chooses to include and exclude; what rules, in other words, are in place. Inspired by Derrida, he calls this simulation fever (2006: 104), and we may well link this to the semiotic unease of the tourist in a strange land. Tourism, as is well established, fosters the hyperreal, the image taking precedence over reality itself. The tourist, in this context, is the one who has to learn what the rules of the game are, what he can and cannot do.

[200] Parkour is a popular sport that makes use of a city's architectures for athletic and explorative running.

[201] This 'button hold' mechanic was first implemented in *Assassin's Creed II*; in the first game in the series, tapping button toggled the free-running or 'high profile' mode.

Yet, it is relevant that Bogost is talking about a different game when speaking of these gameplay elements, namely *Mirror's Edge.* The difference is that *Assassin's Creed*, as a mainstream title intended for wide audiences, is decidedly more forgiving to its players when they make mistakes in their parkour movement (Bogost also offsets the two games in terms of their difficulty). While the city in *Mirror's Edge* is produced as an imposing and towering challenge to be overcome by player skill (that is, the game is difficult to learn), *Assassin's Creed* offers a partly automated form of movement that requires minimal effort on behalf of the player. The game's historical tourist sites are traversed by means of a touristic rationality, that is, involving low stakes and as few inconveniences or roadblocks as possible without actually ceasing to be a game (insofar as it might be lost, where losing equates to a minimal temporary disruption of that flow). Player defeat in *Assassin's Creed* is, as in most *Triple A* games, forgiving: it uses an auto-save function that ensures players do not have to retry sections they previously completed. Games require a degree of uncertainty to hold our interest (Costikyan 2013), and here the uncertainty is touristic: the main risk, for the player, is the possible breakdown of flow.

Narrative VS movement

Tourism, as stated above, involves a problem of sameness: the degree to which one may self-identify as a tourist, we could say, is based on one's willingness to see oneself as partaking in the social and economic structures of the touristic system. Anti-tourism, in that context, is the refusal to implicate oneself in those structural terms – but as we noted already, it is an epiphenomenon of the structures of tourism all the same. The rationality of anti-tourism is one of waywardness and *freedom* from touristic structure, but in fact many types of anti-touristic behavior involve a self-absorbed and even neo-colonial claim to space (cf. Week 2012). *Assassin's Creed* quite effectively shows the coalescence of these two perspectives: the player-character's tourist gaze is routinely activated *through* the logic of anti-tourism. This happens, again, through the forms of movement the player is endowed with, but also through the type of narratively contextualized body they inhabit.

Bakhtin distinguishes centrifugal from centripetal chronotopes: the former pertains to large-scale configurations, dominating whole narratives or genres – Bakhtin's famous example is the classic Greek adventure novel, in which the temporally unchanging hero moves through radically spatially changing environments (Bakhtin 1981: 87-110). We will return to this large chronotope in the concluding section – for now, let us take note of the centripetal chronotope, which arises in a more fixed manner and in quite recognizable everyday settings (Lawson 2011: 389). Bakhtin offers several examples to be found in the novel, such as the

road, which aligns time directly with distance – as in "miles per hour" – and enables largely superficial chance encounters (Lawson 2011: 389).

What does this mean in the context of our game series? *Assassin's Creed III*, for instance, plays out in the American Revolution, which creates a spatial opportunity to represent a form of anti-touristic travel that goes 'across borders' to unexplored territory. A large part of the game is spent at the American Frontier, the terra incognita spanning the American forest, cliffs, and rivers, in which the player-character can self-subserviently hunt for animals and collect resources. Hunter-gatherer mechanics commonly associated with the 'native' are thus combined with the series' archetypical forms of fluid movement – this time across trees, over rocks, and so on. The spatiotemporal environment here is related to a notion of authenticity and belonging: the player-character offered as the protagonist is a half-Mohawk, half-English assassin, born from a brief romance between an English settler and a Native American woman. Half Other, half Westerner, the historical protagonist forms a bridge for the occidental player between the familiar and unfamiliar. This character is then couched in a narrative replete with signifiers indicating the chronotopical authenticity of the Americas' original population. The language spoken by the natives is 'authentic' Kanien'kéha, and the development team was reportedly assisted by a Kahnawà:ke Mohawk community near Montreal, while also contracting some of its residents to help translate, sing and voice act for the game (Newman 2012). The team further hired a Mohawk cultural consultant to help prevent *faux pas* and factual mistakes, who in an interview noted that the game's creators hired him because they likely "wanted to have a real, authentic product that stood up" (Newman 2012). Investments were made to ensure an aura of authenticity around the chronotopical representation of the native Americans. It is noteworthy that these copiously signified 'authentic' local inhabitants also serve as the 'good guys' in the game's narrative, as in the game's fiction the British conquerors are secretly assisted by the templars. The wayward, against-all-odds rebellion against colonial rule thus becomes the player's goal. The mechanics of claiming space as we just described them are, therefore, paradoxically compounded by a narrative that highlights the very subversion of any claim to space (we play as the pirate, or as the rebellious local). We could classify this paradox as a form of ludo-narrative dissonance, a term used by Clint Hocking to explain the friction between a game's mechanics ("what it is about as a game") and its narrative ("what it is about as a story") (Hocking 2007). However, we should note that it is precisely this kind of double orientation – claiming space while rejecting the claim to space – that characterizes and fosters the anti-touristic attitude.

This proceduralized form of 'freedom', the domination of space that operates under the narrative guise of sabotaging the same freedom, returns in *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag*. Here, the player assumes the role of a pirate, the grandfather of the protagonist in *Assassin's Creed III.* Set during the Golden Age of piracy in the Caribbean sea, the game features a gamut of historical stereotypes pertaining to the

pirate identity – "prosperous and free" as one of the protagonist's compatriots calls it while drinking ale on a beach, accompanied by an instrumental sea shanty. Again, by connecting the pirate-as-underdog to the just cause of the assassins, and against the reign of the British and Spanish empires, we see again how *Assassin's Creed* transfixes a chronotopical figure to justify the types of movement: that is, the player-as-pirate sails the seas, explores uninhabited, paradise-like islands, and extracts all the 'collectibles' and treasures until the map is emptied out of icons – a feat that in itself resembles the workings of tourism.

Conclusion

The *Assassin's Creed* series, through its chronotopical movement and representation, proceduralizes the paradoxical anti-touristic sentiments that belong to the age in which the game is written. The series explicitly presents the world *as* a tourist environment, and the player's movement through that environment in its streamlined and half-automated form is reminiscent of all the bodily experiences that nearly all of its players will know from their lives as tourists. Through these procedures and semiotics, the series provides the player-tourist with a set of rules, behaviors, and narratives that fit in with a late modern mindset of global travel. This involves a focus on escaping the tourist role, and a need to become one with the locals while simultaneously remain an outsider – with all its phenomenological advantages.

It has been noted that chronotopes in fictional genres correspond to real-world chronotopes that prevail when that genre first emerged (Clark and Holquist 1984: 278-279; Lawson 2011: 389). Real-world chronotopes inform certain literary genres – the emergence of the modern city as a new spatiotemporal surrounding, for instance, means that fictional narratives can start involving the urban dweller as a character. The genre of historic tourism that *Assassin's Creed* belongs to, shaped by its chronotopical mechanics, sheds a light on anti-tourist attitudes and ideologies of the 21st century. These attitudes are marked by a series of paradoxes. There is the desire to become a part of the crowd, to move through the crowd undetected – the desire to 'become a local'. There is the need to have a constant overview of the geographical situation, evident in the mobile maps and navigation systems that permeate current-day travel. And there is the emptying out the map, the gamification of the touristic 'pure relation' to the world that, as Zygmunt Bauman has noted, is geared toward the iterative consumption of pleasurable sensations – "and that once the satisfaction wanes, it wilts and fades as well" (in Franklin 2003: 208).

Considering the locomotive mechanics in *Assassin's Creed* as touristic forms of movement means to underscore a broader point: locomotion, arguably, is an immediately recognizable way of relating to the world. No matter the visual

accuracy of the simulation, the speed and scope of one's movement through space-time engender ways in which the player may imagine, perceive or experience the world at large. Jesper Juul has argued that video games typically "represent a mirror of our performance in their fictional worlds" (2013: 27): the player's own, first-person goal of mastering the game is typically aligned with a narrative in which one needs to 'make things right' in the game world. This means-end pact between player and character, however, obfuscates the already mentioned overlap of the two through the locomotive ideology that undergirds the game: the player's goal of *Assassin's Creed* is not just to master the game, but also to work through and with their own touristic inclinations by playing the anti-tourist.

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5.2 Procedural (e)motion: Journey as emerging pilgrimage

Tom van Nuenen (2016). Procedural (e)motion: Journey as emerging pilgrimage. *The Journal of Popular Culture* 49(3): 466-491. doi: 10.1111/jpcu.12417

A figure in red robes is sliding down a steep hill of sand. Just behind it, a second character moves concurrently. The avatars are interlocked in their downward momentum, pushed along the same route while they slightly veer left and right, unable to stop the descent. The orange glow of the sunlit dust particles is blinding – then suddenly, the camera pans to show the avatars from an *en profil* perspective. The player sees the skyline, and in its center the silhouette of a mountain. Many carpet-like creatures are flying overhead, all of them moving in the same, ubiquitous direction. Not only is the scene beautifully rendered, it allows players to reflect for a moment on their journey, in all its simplicity and procedural clarity (Figure 1).

Figure 1.

Journey is a third-person adventure game created by *Thatgamecompany* (2012), an American independent[202] game development studio co-founded by University of Southern California graduates Jenova Chen and Kellee Santiago. In *Journey*, the

[202] Such developers generally consist of individuals or small teams, whose games are usually smaller in scope and size than mainstream titles. Indie studios are often not backed by video game publishers, and in those cases have little to no budget available – it is telling, for instance, that during the process of shipping *Journey*, *Thatgamecompany* went bankrupt and had to idle its staff, as the game's development took longer than expected (Chen 2013).

player guides her nameless avatar through a desert and toward a mountain in the distance. There is no spoken or textual dialogue: the game narrates mainly through imagery in cut scenes and environmental storytelling.[203] The aforementioned moment – a sensory combination of striking visuals, music, and simulated locomotion – is memorable to many a player,[204] and assists in explaining the game's favorable reviews and great commercial success (Chen 2012). Since its release, *Journey* has been unanimously lauded by the gaming press; it was argued to be "evidence of a cultural shift in gaming – the start of a new era of thought-provoking, meaningful experiences that stretch the boundaries of the medium" (Parker), as well as "a watershed moment for the game industry; it is our *Citizen Kane*" (Magrino 2012). As such, *Journey* stands as a notable example of the rise of independent game development since the early twenty-first century. Producing such "indie" games became increasingly attractive due to digital distribution platforms such as Steam, Xbox Live Arcade, and the PlayStation Network. Further, independent development allows for a degree of innovation, creativity, and artistic experimentation that is harder to be found in the space of traditional large developers; the latter tend to be more risk-averse due to their high production costs. As such, the schism between indie and 'triple A' games mirrors the contrast between Hollywood and art cinema.

Playing *Journey* is an evocative experience. After its launch, many players testified on social media that they had cried while playing.[205] During a panel at games conference D.I.C.E. in 2013, Jenova Chen – *Journey*'s creative director – recited a letter to him from a fifteen-year old girl who had lost her father after spending their last months together playing the game: "In my dad's and in my own experience with *Journey*, it was about him, and his journey to the ultimate end, and I believe we encountered your game at the most perfect time" (Chen 2013). On a *Tumblr* page dedicated to the 'stories of companionship, sadness, and joy experienced while playing the videogame *Journey*,'[206] another user asked if a game could evoke religious experiences: "I just danced for 20 minutes with a complete stranger in the final level … We synchronized our jumps until we were floating above the light, twirling and dancing and laughing and I just … I don't even know, man. I'm crying. So many feels."[207]

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[203] Players learn about the narrative by means of exploration at their own pace and to the extent of their own interest; this is contrasted by linear, non-ergodic cut scenes or scripted events in which a narrative unfolds without the player being able to influence it (Aarseth 1997; cf. Newman 2002).

[204] For a forum discussion on the game's best moments, in which this specific moment reappears frequently, see for example http://www.thatgamecompany.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=11&t=2802

[205] See for example http://www.gamespot.com/forums/playstation-discussion-1000002/i-cried-when-i- played-journeydid-you-29120844/, http://www.gamefaqs.com/boards/997885-journey/63254262, or http://www.thatgamecompany.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=11&t=3105&start=15, retrieved 15 February 2016.

[206] See http://journeystories.tumblr.com, retrieved 15 February 2016.

[207] See http://journeystories.tumblr.com/post/22019897159/is-it-possible-to-have-a-religious-experience-in-a, retrieved 15 February 2016.

Chen has often noted that his team aims at creating evocative experiences (indeed, inciting 'the feels'). In *Journey*, this incitation is related to the ritual of pilgrimage (Chen 2013). The game therefore can be viewed through the unconventional prism of tourism studies, as a potential space for virtual pilgrimage. Although scholarship on video games may place them in a long tradition of environmental storytelling and other narratives through the structuring of game space (Jenkins 2004: 122; Lammes 2008), tourism studies have as of yet hardly taken notice of gaming. Yet, games enact travel and play out travel narratives.

Exploring narrative and gameplay

What is a pilgrimage? Peter Jan Margry defines it as

> a journey based on religious or spiritual inspiration, undertaken by individuals or groups, to a place that is regarded as more sacred or salutary than the environment of everyday life, to seek a transcendental encounter with a specific cult object for the purpose of acquiring spiritual, emotional or physical healing or benefit. (Margry 2008: 17)

A complication immediately arises in applying this definition to videogames: if players are not commencing their journey for spiritual reasons, which seems fair to argue in a good many cases, can such sensibilities perhaps emerge along the way? Furthermore, the sacred needs to be separated from formal religious institutions. Evans offers an inclusive definition in which the sacred refers to phenomena "set apart with special meaning," often for non-rational reasons (Evans 2003: 36, 39). Virtual pilgrimage has been offered to include online spaces that simulate such sacred events (cf. MacWilliams 2002: 315; Casey 2006: 73; Jacobs 2007: 1103), but this does not answer the question of how the sacred can be evoked by a videogame. It is necessary to investigate the specific kinds of simulation that games are capable of.

While playing *Journey*, its pilgrimesque elements become abundantly clear. Spiritual and religious imagery can be found throughout the game, with runes, shrines, billowing robes, and the solitary desert setting that "can't help but evoke the Old Testament" (MacDonald 2012). Despite the lack of dialogue, a well-established narrative pattern inflects the main story: Joseph Campbell's "monomyth" or hero's journey (2004: 28). Chen has said that his company creates gameplay based on the emotions they want the player to experience (2013). With *Journey*, the goal was to create a cathartic experience, producing awe instead of empowerment, by following the structure of Campbell's concept. Modeled after Arnold van Gennep's threefold structure of rites of passage, this involves a fixed narrative pattern of separation, initiation, and return (2011: 21).

Journey's soundtrack (the first gaming soundtrack to be nominated for a Grammy) uses music to help trace the overarching narrative; composer Austin Wintory based the soundtrack on a musical motif,[208] ending in an aria at the game's end, the lyrics referring to hero's journeys, such as *The Aeneid*, *Beowulf*, and *The Iliad*. Academic research into *Journey* has already taken an interest in these intertextualities: Robert William Guyker, for example, shows how the game draws on myths and motifs like the celestial ascend, shamanism, and the conflict with the dragon (2014: 317-351). Yet, the communicative affordances of *Journey* cannot be understood strictly in terms of narrative.[209] As Espen Aarseth has stressed, videogames are different from literary forms in that they quite literally allow their players to explore, get lost, and discover secret paths through the "topological structures of the textual machinery" (1997: 3).[210]

In terms of gameplay, *Journey* seems relatively straightforward compared to its contemporary congeners: the player avatar mostly walks, surfs, jumps, and glides. *Journey* offers little in terms of a typical gameplay experience; for instance, while the game contains enemy figures, the player has no weapons, and the focus is not on combat. Thus, the game stands in a line of several recently popular indie adventure games (such as *Dear Esther*, *The Stanley Parable*, or *Gone Home*) in which the player does little more than walk through an environmental story, told through elements in the game world. The sand-covered ruins players encounter in *Journey*, for instance, hint at an ancient civilization, but the game never reveals the backstory. Some commentators have argued that a game like *Journey* actually cannot be considered a game at all – for example, because there is no competition or fail state (cf. Stuart). Yet the game offers numerous gaming features: its presentation from the start fits neatly into a third-person adventure genre; hidden items are scattered throughout the world, which the player can collect; and there are puzzles to be solved.

As a disembodied pilgrimage, *Journey* expresses forms of ludic movement (Malliet 2007). Such systems of signification carry significant communicative potency: James Paul Gee argues that video and computer games are a "semiotic domain" of multimodal symbols and representations (2003:12). Within this domain, "information, emotion, and persuasion may be even *more* powerfully conveyed" than through traditional means (Johnson 2009, emphasis original). The immersive, hypnotic nature of games has been noted to suggest a post-literate experience, in which technologies enable humans to transfer information through different means than reading and writing (Tucker 2012).

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[208] See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qGcXI_BaR2Y#t=1666, retrieved 13 April 2015, for the full soundtrack uploaded by Wintory himself, including information about its conceptualization.

[209] Besides, as Ciccoricco emphasizes, to address games strictly in terms of either their representational material or their gameplay mechanics is as unproductive as it is unconvincing (2014: 224-227).

[210] This is contrary to the argument that literature in and of itself allows the reader to explore its imaginary world. Aarseth's point is that within games, exploration is not just a metaphor for that which happens in the mind of the reader, but something that happens in the material act of play.

Ian Bogost has introduced the concept of procedural rhetoric to argue that games communicate ideas about worldly processes through their behavior: the procedures (or processes) in games are sets of constraints that create possibility spaces, which can be explored through play (Bogost 2007: vii-xi). Play then refers to the 'possibility space' created by constraints of all kinds. Gameplay functions as such a form of verisimilitude, a proxy for reality. The simulation in games is a communication act with the capacity of transmitting the core of an idea without the direct use of language. The concept of procedural rhetoric, to Bogost, exposes and interrogates games for their ideological underpinnings (Bogost 2008: 128). After all, video games do not operate in a cultural vacuum: they contain ideologies, whether intentionally or not. They can proceduralize such an ideology, or offer a critique of it, through play. What kind of ideology does *Journey* offer, then? Most significantly, it represents travel by evoking a sense of physical, spatial teleological elevation that is traditionally found in the pilgrim narrative – a virtually approximated pilgrim experience. Procedural rhetoric elucidates that *Journey* as a communicative media format can convince its players to consider themselves pilgrims by the very act of play.

At this point, the relationship between avatar and player needs some additional clarification. As James Newman has noted, a dichotomous subject/object relationship between these two entities is inadequate. Phenomenologically speaking, the robed, silent avatar in *Journey* cannot be neatly distinguished from the player – rather, it is an empty vessel that players can temporarily inhabit. Newman points out that an avatar is a 'suite of characteristics or equipment' that can be utilized and embodied by the controlling player. The main player-character relationship is thus one of "vehicular embodiment," and oftentimes, "the player experiences at the level of first-hand participation and can then sustain and decode multiple and apparently contradictory presentations of the self." For game players, avatars are like vehicles onto which goals, skills, experiences, and an understanding of the game can be projected, so that the player balances between multiple identities (Simons 2007). This is why, in recollection of their play, players talk not about playing or controlling but about *being* their avatar. With that said, unification is never reached, and focusing on the moments in which player and avatar encounter and diverge from each other during gameplay can assist in establishing the disparity between the two.

Establishing pilgrimage through procedures

Chen and his team borrowed consciously from Campbell's monomyth to direct their game's narrative and emotional arc. Surely, the monomyth is a tried and tested narrative device, but the procedures of and responses to *Journey* do not derive from Campbell's universalized psychology alone. The monomyth has become a conven-

tional stylistic device – even formulaic – in movies and video games alike, after Lucas's seminal use of it in *Star Wars*. Emotional responses to the hero's journey may thus simply arise because audiences have become so familiar with its elements, and not because of the universal psychic resonance that Campbell postulated. Instead, a related but different approach to *Journey's* procedural rhetoric might be offered, based on the elaboration on Van Gennep by American anthropologists Victor Turner and Richard Schechner. The latter, in *Between Theater and Anthropology*, showed the significant similarities in the workings of rituals and theatrical performances, suggesting that the latter can be an extension of the former.[211] For instance, both such enactments can transport and transform one's status or consciousness. They can allow for an intensity of performance, as well as facilitate interactions between audience and performer. And they consist of a whole sequence of conducts that unfold both prior to and after the main event (Schecher and Appel 1990: 4).

Journey, by extent, can be accessed as a 'theatrical situation': a work of dramatic entertainment that stages a liminoid[212] experience as an extension of the pilgrimage's ritual workings (Turner and Turner 2011: xiii). Turner conceptualized the liminoid as "anti-structure," a temporary antithesis of the ordinary community to which pilgrims belong in their everyday lives (1974: 60). The pilgrim exists at a threshold between social spaces in an ambiguous state of existence (Turner and Turner 2011: 2). Transposing this idea upon *Journey*, the key is to identify which narrative or gameplay procedure transforms the game from a regular locomotive experience – the type of walking that avatars generally do in games – to one of pilgrimage. From the very start, *Journey* closely follows Turner's key stages that the pilgrim goes through in the liminal rite.

The rite itself comprises several stages: the description of those stages, under both Campbell's and Turner's interpretation, strongly resembles that of Van Gennep. The first stage involves the removal of previously taken-for-granted social roles and limits, recreating the initiate as a *tabula rasa* (Van Gennep 2011: 21). Upon starting the game, players are confronted with a swelling, swirling orchestral wall of sound, while the camera sweeps through a desert at intense speed. This is immediately followed by silence, as the player is introduced to her avatar, meditating in the desert sand. In the subsequent minutes, as the player learns the basics of movement and starts exploring the environment, a very minimalistic musical palette is employed to emphasize the dynamic difference and the state of *tabula rasa.*

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[211] In fact, in *By Means of Performance*, Schechner noted that his intellectual goal had been to propose general principles and methodological approaches to understand games, sports, and rituals alike as performances (1981: 3).

[212] A 'liminoid' experience as it can be found in performance is distinct from a traditionally liminal one, as Victor Turner has noted, because of its optionality and leisurely nature. "One is all play and choice, an entertainment, the other is a matter of deep seriousness, even dread, it is demanding, compulsory" (Turner 1974: 74).

The next step of the liminal rite, according to Van Gennep, is that it must follow a strictly prescribed sequence, where everybody knows what to do and how (2011: 21). Again, *Journey* follows suit, this time through its directive *mise-en-scène*: a lone dune stretches out before the player, with two rectangular stones at its top. The game evokes the impression that the player is free to move in whatever direction they choose, yet the dune and its stones are the only thing worth noting and investigating. The insubordinate player will find out that walking in another direction is unsuccessful: gusts of wind make it impossible to wander too far. Upon reaching the top, the camera zooms out to reveal the mountain, and with it the title screen (Figure 2).

The player's cultural familiarity with the monomyth ensures that no additional narrative explanations are needed: the mountain, combined with the title screen, establishes a plain directive. Throughout the game, the strictly prescribed sequence that pertains to pilgrimage is reinforced by *Journey*'s level design and camera mechanics, where the mountain is nearly always visible in the distance. Camera perspectives guide the players' eyes to where they are supposed to look or walk: during several key moments, the camera will surreptitiously pan toward the mountain, indicating the task ahead. Similarly, the deeply dynamic soundtrack guides players forward by adding instruments, melodic lines, or rhythmic percussion as they progress in the right direction. *Journey*'s overt spatial teleology sets it apart from third-person videogames that prompt a free exploration of game space (such as the *Assassin's Creed* or *GTA* series), and even from those games that feature a strictly linear gameplay and narrative (such as *The Last of Us*). It is unambiguously unidirectional to the player.

Figure 2. Title screen of *Journey*

Locomotive procedures

The ascent and subsequent descent of the first dune that the player encounters promptly establishes two key gameplay procedures in *Journey* – climbing and surfing. These seemingly arbitrary forms of locomotion are subtly augmented in terms of *feel*, the unquantifiable, phenomenological form of bodily awareness that accompanies a gameplay experience (Shinkle 2005: 3). The *feel* of *Journey* works by means of an oscillation: the slowing down and laborious bodily gestures of the avatar when trudging uphill are complemented by the effortless feeling of surfing down hills of sand. Indeed, *Journey* shows how pleasures of playing a videogame are a kinaesthetic, "embodied event" (Newman 2002; Shinkle 2005: 2). The game emphasizes the somatic, phenomenological dimensions of gameplay, the corporeal connection between player and avatar. Rikke Toft Nørgård helpfully applies Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of the body schema to explain that, instead of merely knowing the avatarial body through perception, "players know themselves as avatars through the corporeal-locomotive action they undertake" (2011: 6).

This avatarial consolidation is vital in understanding *Journey* as an experience of pilgrimage – which, after all, is a "kinetic ritual" at its core (Turner and Turner 2011: xiii). Pilgrimages include many kinds of movement, such as walking the well-trotted route to Santiago, crawling to the Basilica of Guandalupe, or dancing – a notable tradition in the Andean area (Crumrine and Morinis 1991: 83, 310). It has been noted that photographers and anthropologists run into a dilemma when representing images of pilgrimage, as their literal or ethnographic snapshots are fixed instead of fluid physical processes (Coleman and Eade 2004: 2). The player of *Journey*, by contrast, can playfully approximate something of the pilgrim's locomotive dynamics – more specifically, its capacity to project the ebb and flow of hardship and prosperity, dejection and euphoria, of which the pilgrim's itinerary consists.

The player learns how to jump in the very first act of the game by collecting glyphs that extend the scarves of her avatar; the length of a scarf corresponds with the length of time she can jump and glide. These mechanics are used conventionally – to navigate over obstacles and across platforms – but again, the cadence and *feel* of temporary weightlessness, together with the fluttering, swirling motions of the avatar as it is carried by the wind, define the mechanics. Compared to the tool-assisted gliding to be found in games such as *Far Cry 3* and *The Legend of Zelda*, the aerial conduct in *Journey* derives from the sensation of weightlessness of the cloth-coated avatar itself. Moreover, jumping is the main procedure through which the player gets to fulfill the pilgrimage rite. In one section of the game, the avatar ascends a number of platforms surrounding a tall, temple-like structure. The music and pacing of the level follow a pattern of *crescendo*, as the player progresses upward toward a cathartic moment when she reaches the zenith. More broadly speaking, jumping provides a momentary and subtle stimulus that, far from being a

trivial gameplay mechanic, can be considered a form of kinesthetic semiotics, capable of signifying transcendence.

Valleys in the game's tension are communicated through climbing sections, most notably in the final act of the game, as the player is walking up the final mountain slope in a snowstorm, and any forward momentum is slowly extenuated. After collapsing and seemingly succumbing to the perilous weather, the screen fades to white and the music fades away. The scripted event takes away player control to fully convey the theme of physical exhaustion that constitutes the pilgrim experience (cf. Eade and Sallnow 1991: 16-24). The minutes of increasingly strenuous movement that precede it are key: the player is gradually stripped of her control of movement. After an uncomfortably long pause, in which the screen remains blank, she sees a group of white-robed spiritual elders surrounding and reviving the avatar, coinciding with the monomythical resurrection trope (ibid.: 131). Then, in a sudden moment of visual and aural animation, the player is thrust upwards, and the ensuing, final section of the game involves a sequence of ecstatic elevation. Finally rising above the clouds, in a blissful, paradise-like setting, the player flies ever upward to the final mountaintop. The section is more radiant and bright than any other space in the game, and this is synonymous with the player's ability to see and navigate the world: with the restrictions of flight suspended, she can explore and fly to the top of the mountain at will (Figure 3).

Figure 3.

Other peaks in the tension are delivered through surfing sections in which the player slides down vast hills of sand, straight toward the mountain, unable to stop. She can slightly swerve left and right, but finds she has to relinquish control and accept the

flow in which she is captured, following the path laid out before her. By doing so, *Journey* not only delivers a cathartic experience through scripted movement, but it also emphasizes an important element of pilgrimage. The surf, more than the narrative, is the *modus operandi* for the experience of liminality, the quality of ambiguity or disorientation that occurs in the middle stage of rituals. *Journey* offers an approximation of this process by deploying the virtual body as the primary site of knowing the world, and bodily movement as a central epistemological device.

The locomotive procedures help us to understand a number of interrelated concepts in the game; firstly, flow, a term related to *feel* that is used in psychology and gaming studies to describe the feeling of complete and energized focus in an activity, with a high level of enjoyment and fulfillment.[213] This involves a delicate balance between the challenges of the activity and the abilities of the participant (Csíkszentmihályi 1990: 6). Flow has been used to describe the loss of time-awareness that players experience in certain games (e.g. Baron 2015). This is quite reminiscent of the 'alternative structure' of the liminal moment, which according to Turner involves a demarcation of sacred space and time from its regular forms; a liminal rite is beyond or outside the parameters of traditional space-time, which controls regular, secular processes and routines (Turner 1974: 56-57). Arguably, besides the narrative structure of the monomyth, it is the sense of flow in *Journey* that evokes a sense of liminality in the player.[214] It is in this sense that video game mechanics can be connected to the theatrical performance. Schechner notes that the "intensity of performance" is related to flow, and offers that this intensity is singular in the theatrical environment, as these performances "gather their energies almost as if time and rhythm were concrete, physical, pliable things" (1981: 11). The corporeal-locomotive action of the player/avatar, reinforced by the modulated intervals of musical motifs and rhythms and visual cues, offer an experience of intensity and flow that is not of the same social nature as that in theatre, but can be described as such nonetheless.

It should be added that not only the movement of players induces this state of flow; the properties of the space through which they move is significant as well. An important example is the behavior of the sand on which the avatar treads. It is constantly in motion and behaves as a liquid, forming waves and flows under the avatar's feet; players have rightfully called their form of movement 'sand surfing.' Another significant part of the game takes place in an underground cavern that, due to the blue color scheme and the appearance of a water-like ether through which avatars can fly endlessly, looks like a subaquatic environment and is often colloquially called the 'underwater level' (Figure 4).

[213] Tellingly, Jenova Chen has published a MFA thesis on flow in games (Chen 2007).

[214] *Thatgamecompany*'s first official game *flOw* is an evident example of gameplay built around the concept of flow.

Figure 4. Underwater level

The dunes and underground area work as metaphors, a heuristic approximation in which a visual and procedural synthesis takes place surrounding the concept of flow – and, related to flow, the concept of *immersion*. This sensation, as Murray (1998: 98) once described it, is "of being surrounded by a completely other reality, as different as water is from air." In other words, *Journey* spatializes flow and immersion, and allows a phenomenological experience of their conceptual tangibility. Flow and immersion are enhanced by the avatar's insignificant power; she has no way of defending herself from enemies in the game's second half, and is frequently at the behest of the elements – most notably near the end when she is jostled by the wind.

We can further understand the way in which liminality works in *Journey* by considering the exploits of environmental glitches in the game – going to 'glitch world' as some of the players call it (Figure 5). This refers to a type of gameplay in which the player gets to explore parts of the game that the creator did not intend to be seen, in a 'deconstructive run' that breaks the game's locus of control over the player and allows her to escape the intended pilgrimage (Scully-Blaker 2014; cf. Sicart 2011). But this type of transgressive play can also be deemed an exemplary procedure of liminality – crossing the threshold of the everyday into the realm of the extraordinary. Remarkably, many of the players on *Thatgamecompany*'s forum endow the new places and vistas in glitch world with the same sense of liminality as the places in their 'official' playthrough.[215] As one user puts it, "While these

[215] See http://www.thatgamecompany.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=16&t=3339, retrieved 15 February 2016.

glitches are nothing but programming deficiencies or mistakes, they actually become an astonishing new adventure in *Journey*."[216]

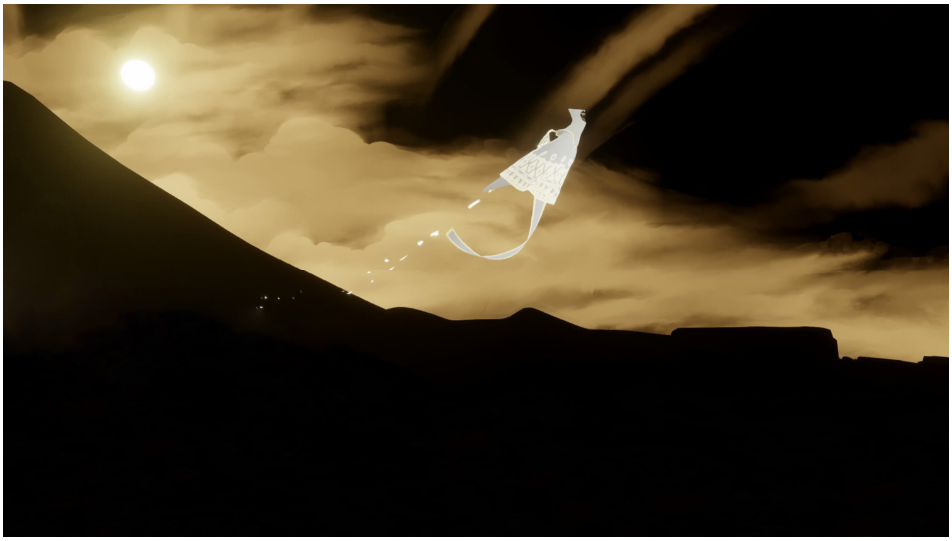

Figure 5. Glitch world

There is a link here to operational processes in tourism. Dean MacCannell, inspired by Erving Goffman's distinction between the dramaturgical front and back regions of everyday life, argued that a main component in the structure of tourism is the longing to reach past the 'front region' meeting places of customers and service persons. Such tourists rather aim to see 'back region' places that are usually closed to outsiders – the kitchen, the backyard, the private party – as these are considered to be more authentic, intimate, or real (MacCannell 1976: 91-95). There are striking similarities between MacCannell's tourists looking for back regions, and the players looking for cracks in *Journey*'s code to go 'out of bounds'[217] and penetrate the game's back region of unauthorized or unfinished environments. Beyond the disruption, 'breaking the game' can be a search for authenticity outside the carefully planned experiences within the confines of the 'official' game space. Indeed, the players' discourse of wonder when talking about glitch world remains strikingly similar to their conversations about the authorized game space.

Through exploitation of the game's control glitches, several players have mastered what they call 'fast flying': a meticulously performed controller input

[216] See http://www.thatgamecompany.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=16&t=3339#p46425, retrieved 15 February 2016.

[217] 'Out of bounds' moves are typically performed by moving through walls or corners, or by reaching places that do not have invisible walls, so as to leave the authorized play area.

sends their avatars soaring and walking at very fast speeds. A user on *Thatgamecompany*'s forum explains:

> The freedom of dive boosting and the incredible speed of fast flying feels almost essential to me now. Charge boosting has also gotten me out of many sticky situations. Flying glitches make me feel free. A skilled bird in flight instead of a clumsy moth.[218]

Players explain their newfound skills as integral to their gaming experience, as they become more proficient after hours of practice and repetition. But the last quote especially illustrates the feelings of revelation and epiphany residing in these skill-based affordances. In Goffmanian terms, these players might not be following the script they are offered, but they are still playing in the same show.

Constructing communitas

In large part, the experience of *Journey* is enhanced within a multiplayer environment, bringing out a sense of virtual co-presence (Urry 2002: 266). Up to two players who are traversing the same area in the game can be randomly connected to each other. Players can then decide if they want to travel together – up until the very end of the game if they wish to do so – by staying in each other's vicinity. There are no ways of identifying or communicating with the other player, and *Journey* provides no signaling information such as gamer tags.[219] All it offers is what some players have called 'chirping,' amounting to the utterance of a single note that intensifies as the corresponding button is pressed longer. Further, the game actively subverts gender in order to support the communitas experience. The robed figures in *Journey* are quite androgynous, containing few gendered signs in their appearance. In the commentary video on the game's 'collector's edition', Jenova Chen mentions that in testing, male players referred to the main character as 'he,' while female players said 'she' (Thatgamecompany 2013).

Besides this one companion, no others are present in the world to share the pilgrimage. Within the logic of the game, the sights remain exclusive to the procedurally coupled duo, significantly shaping the experience. As Walker Percy remarks, looking is a commodified practice to many a traveler, and "the more lookers, the less there is to see" (2000: 49). The hope of such a traveler to have 'the whole place to yourself' means that one can somehow see better when others are

[218] See http://www.thatgamecompany.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=16&t=3339#p46383, retrieved 15 February 2016.

[219] Yet, after the end credits, players do get to see the gamer tags of the others they have met on their playthrough. Lifting up the veil of anonymity allows players to connect to each other after the game is finished, which finalizes the communitas experience: they reach a new state of acquaintance, allowing them to share their experience.

not present, signaling complex social dynamic of sovereignty and *zoning* in the structure of travel. In *Journey*, this zoning involves the complete removal of others, except for one other person. The player is playfully encouraged to keep the other one as close as possible, as avatars that touch each other automatically recharge their scarves. More importantly, sharing the exceptional vistas in *Journey* creates a sense of amity. It functions by means of an anti-touristic logic (Redfoot 1984: 305) inasmuch as the world is 'emptied out': there are no others in sight, and players have all the space they could want. At the same time, the one-on-one connection begets a more intimate relationship between strangers, which renders everything they see and experience together significantly more meaningful.

The avatars are subsequently introduced into dangerous scenarios. Aerial snake-like machines start attacking, and the players are unable to fight back. The experience of shared hardship with an anonymous other is a recurrent theme within the affective responses of players. One such player reminisces:

> We each found ourselves torn from the other: me, by a burst of wind that effortlessly threw me back, and you, by the breath of another of these creatures. I made it up the cliffs first, and waited for you at the end. Approaching a frozen summit, I watched you collapse, and I fell soon after.[220]

Thus, the game proceduralizes Turnerian *communitas*, which can be defined as a bond of spontaneous and egalitarian ties that develops between pilgrims. Within this communitas experience, socioeconomic structures dividing people in everyday life fall apart. What remains is a feeling of harmony and commonality, "a spontaneously generated relationship between leveled and equal total and individuated human beings, stripped of structural attributes" (Turner 1973: 216). If virtual connections allow people to feel each other's proximity (Urry 2002: 267), *Journey* shows that they also allow for a sense of communitas. Another player explains:

> I met my best Journey friend thus far . . . I wish I could give them a name. But I became so emotionally attached to my partner, and clearly vice-verse. We chirped all the time with one another as we went, waited for each other when one got caught up, and worried and cared for one another. We even ran side by side each other as equals most of the time.[221]

A procedurally allocated network – more specifically, a random, anonymous, temporary connection between two people playing the game – can create a sense of potential confrontation and anxiety (Van Nuenen 2015: 9). The player does not

[220] See http://journeystories.tumblr.com/post/100528021593/small-hope, retrieved 15 February 2016.
[221] See http://journeystories.tumblr.com/post/101026723511/i-bought-journey-online-four-days-ago-and-today, retrieved 15 February 2016.

know to whom she might be connected, or who might enter her personal game space. In *Journey,* the disclosure of the Other is reworked into a moment of recognition, set against the sense of solitude invoked by the desert setting. Players are not cathartically introduced to each other; the only sign the game offers to show that another player is nearby is a faint white glow at the corresponding edge of the screen.

As they start cooperating, there are no ways for players to sabotage each other. Jenova Chen has explained that in earlier versions of the game, avatars were able to physically interact, e.g. by holding hands – but this mainly resulted in players pushing each other off ledges (Chen 2013). To prevent players from disrupting the communitas experience, Chen and his team removed all of these mechanics. As a result, *Journey* pursues a removal of social differentiation, mirroring the communitas experience. Still, an indication of in-game experience is expressed in the accumulation of symbols on the player's robe, as well as in its color. Players have the capacity to turn into a white-robed elder figure, after finding all of the glyphs hidden throughout the game. They can thus enact the relationship of teacher and student; as white-robed avatars they can lead their red-colored partners along the way. These subtle signs of distinction and competition underline *Journey*'s status as a game – however, they do not necessarily function at the expense of the communitas experience. In a game in which the ritual of pilgrimage emerges through the aesthetics of movement, the aspect of guidance is central to the corporeal-locomotive learning curve. Players can both show and show off the glyphs that are hard to reach or find, their scarves, hidden areas, and glitching moves such as fast flying.[222] The game's community, in short, teaches itself how to peregrinate.

The perpetual pilgrimage

The inter-player stories that emerge in a playthrough clearly have precedence over the abstract narrative *Journey* presents. The story unfolds in non-interactive cutscenes in between the levels. These remain deliberately vague but generally follow Campbell's monomythical structure, involving a tale of separation, initiation, and return (2004: 28). Main themes include the mountain as the mythical Arche, a ruined and eroded civilization, and the avatar embarking on an adventure to finally return to the sanctuary.[223] By piecing together a personal story from the rather abstract imagery, players are able to construct a personal motive. Even the end of the game does not provide a clear resolution, as *Journey* omits showing the final moment of the story, the ultimate boon (Campbell 2004: 159-178). The avatar walks into the light of the iconic crevice at the mountain's top, while the player is

[222] Most of the retellings on http://journeystories.tumblr.com/, in fact, make mention of helping other players.
[223] Interestingly, this fits in with the increasing academic attention to pilgrimages toward the homeland, such as Afro-Americans returning to Africa (cf. Powers 2011: 1362).

blinded by a white light and left to her own devices regarding the conclusive meaning of the quest. The scene constitutes the separation between avatar and player: while the former might reach the sacred site as the final goal, the latter is taken to the credits. Far from breaking the immersion, this procedure prevents the disillusionment of arrival that is not only familiar to players finishing a game, but to many pilgrims arriving in Santiago as well (Margry 2008: 24). *Journey* presents the pilgrimage as an end in itself.

After finishing the game, an element of circularity and perpetuity is introduced. As the closing credits roll, the player sees a bright light coming from the top of the mountain and traveling back through all of the game's environments – the return of the protagonist that ends each hero's journey (Campbell 2004: 179-221). Through this abstract repetitiveness, *Journey* lacks a clear direction toward a 'sociocultural center,' a term that Erik Cohen used to describe an individual's societally influenced core beliefs. To Cohen, this center is key to understand the itinerary of pilgrims: "The pilgrim, and the 'pilgrim-tourist' peregrinate *toward* their sociocultural center, while the traveler and the 'traveler-tourist' move in the opposite direction" (1979: 37). In *Journey,* the final destination is (and remains) unknown; it is superseded by the journey itself. It is the teleological act without the teleology itself, the modern "wandering pilgrimage," with an emphasis on the transformation of the self (Morinis 1992: 11-13). In fact, insofar as it constitutes a series of vistas for the player to behold and wander through, the game seems as much of a 'tour' as it is a pilgrimage: a visually pleasurable trip that ultimately ends where it began. And yet, as the credits transition into the opening screen where the player can press start to begin anew, the mountain already looms in the background[224] and the pilgrim's ritual reemerges. No tour is perpetually aimed at the same point of convergence.

Conclusion

Games and tourism alike may be fleeting or trivial. Moreover, their enactment often follows a preformed script – a sequence or *path*[225] of places to see and activities to perform – and both are all too often connected to the rationale of efficiency and usefulness. Tourists, says Zygmunt Bauman, have a "pure relationship" to the place they visit: the purpose is the consumption of pleasurable sensation, and "once the satisfaction wanes, it wilts and fades as well – and so you move to another relationship, hopefully as 'pure' as the last one" (quoted in Franklin 2003: 208). This critique of utilitarianism and commodification is equally applicable to players,

[224] Only after the player has finished the game, the mountain is immediately visible at the opening screen, while initially it remains obscured until the player has climbed the first dune. The 'reveal' is no longer necessary: the player knows already where she is intended to go.

[225] The term refers here to computing, in which it denotes a unique location in a file system that is pinpointed by following the directory tree hierarchy.

residing in game worlds only as long as they are sufficiently gratified by the experience. Elsewhere, Bauman has placed the tourist right beside the player as two late modern successors to the early modern pilgrim for whom identity was a conscious project, a journey toward a fixed destination (1996: 29-32). Both contemporary figures, however, choose their destinations gratuitously, with a clear and uncontested ending, in an activity without lasting consequences.

Journey reconfigures this constellation of scripted journeys: what emerges is the paradoxical figure of the 'pilgrim player,' who preserves traits from both the modern tourist and her predecessor. Instead of allowing "no room for pity, compassion, commiseration or cooperation" (Bauman 1996: 32), the game's mechanisms of teleological movement and voiceless communitas offer an evocative simulative construction of the pilgrim's bodily experience and wordless social bonds in an awe-inspiring environment. With this, *Journey* stands in a long literary tradition, and might be connected to the 'imaginary voyage,' a literary genre deriving from the romantic period that depicts fantastical and wondrous journeys to faraway and unknown lands (Arthur 2001: 186). A characteristic quality of the genre (and romanticism in general) is that of 'excess' – that is, an experience that cannot be expressed in language and that leads to a sense of powerlessness. Consider, for reference, the best-selling games of 2012: nearly all action-adventure games on the list involve the parameters of conquest, in which the player acts as the powerful hero (e.g. *Call of Duty*: *Black Ops*, *Assassins Creed III*, or *Halo 4*).[226] The significance of *Journey* as a site of pilgrimage derives from the player interfacing with an avatarial body that, instead of a powerful agent, is not fit to colonize the world, and in fact is vulnerably exposed to it. The avatar deviates from the physically powerful heroes that inhabit Campbell's monomythical narratives. Instead, *Journey* supports a point made by Turner, namely that liminoid performances and rituals need not enforce social norms, but can be subjunctive or subversive. "'Anti-structure', in fact, can generate and store a plurality of alternative models for living" (Turner 1974: 65). The types of responses by the game's devoted player community firmly underscore this point. These players may be tourists, but only insofar as MacCannell characterizes them: they embark on "an earnest quest for the authentic, the pilgrimage of modern man" (in Cohen 1979: 179).

Yet, there are some caveats to this conclusion. The concept of 'secular religion' has been used to conceptualize a wide array of experiences, such as fan visits to the resting place of music stars. Margry, in response to this, has noted that such secularization devaluates the concept of pilgrimage, since "[its] main goals are the sacred, the religious, the cultus object; without them there is no pilgrimage" (2008: 29). The inflation of the ritual should be avoided: pilgrimage must include a sense of sacrality. But as we saw, the procedural mechanics of *Journey* do bring

[226] See http://metro.co.uk/2013/01/14/100-best-selling-games-of-2012-revealed-3351774/, retrieved 15 Feb. 2016.

players to communicate about sacred matters. Of course, the overlap of play and sacrality is nothing new: Huizinga, when discussing play as a decidedly spiritual human act, already noticed how the game space acts as a ritual and intensified space of cultural expression, allowing new identities and spatial meanings to be created.

Secondly, a rather obvious observation has thus far been kept implicit: *Journey* is a disembodied pilgrimage, and traveling within it is a metaphorical matter. Explaining the difference between real-life and virtual pilgrimages, MacWilliams (2002: 326) offers the following:

> The arduous journey to a distant place, the ascetical practices that are so important in penitential pilgrimages, do not exist virtually. The virtual journey is a disembodied act of the imagination that cannot fully simulate the physical rigors of the RL [real life] original.

While telematic travel ostensibly is not synonymous with terrestrial, bodily travel (cf. Urry 2002: 262), the player may not find the phenomenological difference distinct. The real/virtual divide is, as ever, deceptive. The very sense of physicality defines the experience of *Journey* – and arguably, of games in general, as they "anchor our experience and subjectivity firmly in the body or in an ambiguous boundary between the body and technology" (Lahti 2003: 158). This approximation of the pilgrimage allows for an extended understanding of what constitutes 'bodily' to begin with.

In conclusion, further analysis of modern games through a prism of tourism studies is both necessary and overdue in order to understand the interrelations between travel and play. As videogames are becoming more and more graphically realistic and mechanically sophisticated, the phenomenological boundaries between terrestrial and virtual travel becomes increasingly hard to discern. Yet this transference also occurs in the opposite direction, as contact between people increasingly runs via algorithmic and procedural systems (Manovich 2013: 4). Consequently, the types of online games we play, and the stances and behaviors that those games engender toward those we encounter, cannot be so strictly separated from the ways in which we think about and act toward those we meet on our terrestrial trips. Players and travelers are interrelated within networked and algorithmic culture.

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5.3 *Interlude: Travel apps as travel games*

We have considered how videogames, in their procedural representation of environment and mobility, allow for the enactment of archetypical traveler roles. One thing that should be further expanded upon here is the relationship that these games, as virtual contexts, have to the forms of corporeal travel discussed in the previous sections. When we focused on blogs and platforms, we could see how these online and computational forms of 'travel writing' were in fact practices of (self-) advertising and play, in which users may enact the role of certain travel figures (such as the expert, the pilgrim, or the insider). The construction of these roles, we further noticed, depended to a significant extent on their programmatological contexts: blogs incorporated specific themes and layouts to attain and maintain a readership, while platforms assemble and organize their user-generated content to accommodate the creation of certain kinds of personas.

When it comes to videogames, we can render a similar point. That is, we ought not to regard them as self-enclosed slot machines, but as *applications*: programs or pieces of software designed to fulfill a particular purpose. The question is what purpose this is, which social dynamics construct that purpose, and how online and offline interactions in search of this purpose are related. The world games represent may be thought of as a closed off virtual realm, but even this does not imply that the act of play is solely an *escapist* exercise, or that a game's systems of meaning-making are somehow only relevant within the boundaries of the medium – that would mean to retreat into the abandoned idea of the virtual as 'another realm' (see also Varis and Van Nuenen forthcoming). Bart Simon, adopting such a perspective, comments: "whereas communication in other electronic media generally refers to life experiences independent of the medium of communication, in online games the opposite is true, and communication generally remains tied to the game itself" (Simon 2006: 65). This, to him, means that players compose their 'virtual identities' from the game world instead of from their "regular lives" (ibid.). Yet no such neat distinction can be made: both offline and online identity resources latch on to the broader processes constitutive for identity at large. The game is part and parcel of 'regular life', and this goes for games in the context of travel writing as well.

Instead of asking how communication in games differs from that of other electronic media, as Simon suggests, we might appreciate games as another variety in the representational and interactive algorithmic forms of travel writing practices. This is becoming more significant by the day, as the digital environment, once considered 'another realm' to be entered through the screen of a computer, increasingly acts as a virtual extension of our bodies. This is enabling an ever-increasing and deeper immersion in a non-physical world of experiences and to-ing and fro-ing from that tangible physical environment to a previously parallel but now integral sphere of experience and engagement. We can think here of pervasive augmented reality video-games in which players have to traverse meatspace with their cellphones in order to

complete in-game goals (for instance, catching Pokémon in the recently released *Pokémon Go*). This type of hybrid game has its own ramifications for the alleged divide between offline and online, and the safety of players-as-travelers (since users may well be led to unsafe or dangerous places by the game's mechanics, beyond the game designers' intent).

The cycling between the two spheres is apparent in a most visible form when one has a conversation while also going about numerous tasks and engaging in social practices on a mobile device – a typical mode of communication today. But it has not always been so, and this is changing social practices and with it the way people experience proximity itself. The physical and extended digital worlds are blurring. For many people they are inextricably intertwined and the digital dimension has become an indispensible part of their persona (Arthur and Van Nuenen forthcoming). A further point, one that was made when looking at *Journey,* is that it is precisely within scripted forms that people can strategically (re)invent themselves, and define their relationship to the world and other travelers. The player of the videogame can start thinking about identity in new ways because of the itineraries that the procedural environment offers.

We can, finally, also briefly consider a different app, to see how forms of play are interwoven into our daily, corporeal lives and travels. To do so, we can take a closer look of a certain dating app's advertisement video.

Traveling with Tinder

The advertisement of *Tinder Plus*[227] starts in an office cubicle – not the grey, claustrophobic kind, but the Manhattan variety, bright and spacious. A blonde girl, hard at work, gets a message from a friend: "Hey, how was your vacation!?" The girl smirks, sits back and lets out a sigh of relief as a subtle electronic rhythm starts swelling, accompanied by the sound of waves. We see her on a boat, and as she opens her *Tinder* app, she selects her current location: London. Joyous, fast-paced and light-hearted music now kicks in, as a brisk-paced sequence of travel vignettes flashes by: taking pictures of the Big Ben (with a plastic camera, *not* her phone), waiting on the metro (*not* the cab), playfully holding an issue of *Suitcase* magazine inside the metro, eating fish and chips. Then, the other cast shows up: she is with a guy, visiting a soccer stadium. He takes her home, she says goodbye at the doorstep and contemplates that choice back home in the bathroom.

Next scene: Paris. A young man named Sam shows up on her dating app. She swipes left – then changes her mind and undoes the action (a feature only available to *Tinder Plus* members). "It's a match," *Tinder* chirps, and in the next shot, Sam is handing her a bouquet of red roses in front of the Eiffel Tower (we softly hear him say "Bonjour", while the girl sighs and flicks a curl behind her ear). Now they are taking selfies, posing in front of the Louvre, smiling in a carousel by night. Then, the fallout at

[227] See https://vimeo.com/111080451; all sources were accessed June 12, 2016.

the end of act two: they fight on the street, she chucks a glass of water in his face – and immediately after starts making out with him. Next shot: she wakes up in bed, Sam next to her. They go to a museum, drink wine on another boat; he gently holds the side of her back as she beams in romantic joy. He kisses her – first on the cheek, then as the French do – as her cab is waiting, her suitcase already in its trunk.

The third act commences, and we see the girl flicking through *Tinder* again. As she changes her location once more, we see she has messaged Sam: "Miss you!" He responds: "Have fun in Istanbul! Maybe see you soon ;)" We see a foggy day, the Hagia Sophia, the Blue Mosque, as the wayward girl buys trinkets and sweets and coffee in colorful stalls. But when she sits down, watching yet another splendid piece of history, she sighs. There is no one to share it with. Until Sam moves into the frame again – a single rose in hand. Now they're visiting Cappadocia, riding camels, and ending up in a luxurious hotel room. She sits in the bathtub, takes off her top. Cut away to the next day, a balloon flight at sunset. They kiss. Hard cut to the office and the music falls away, where she falls back in her chair with a sigh and a satisfied look in her eyes. "*Tinder Plus*". The ad, a new spin on cosmopolitan dating, clocks in at 1:26 seconds.

Dating app *Tinder* was released in 2012 and gained significant momentum in the succeeding years. By analyzing the app through the prism of procedural rhetoric, we can see how *Tinder* needs to be understood as a game that brings real bodies and locality into the fold. The immense popularity of the app can likely be attributed to the simplicity of its game mechanics: one simply logs in through the Facebook API, and pictures of available dates start showing up within a user-determined radius[228] based on their current location. While these profile pictures of others are being loaded, the app shows a series of red pulsating ripples emanating from the user's profile picture that is positioned in the center. The user can click on her own profile during this loading time, making additional circles appear with each click – the illusion of responsiveness, as if the homing device that is hard at work will fire off yet more often, yielding even better results. Once the profile pictures of possible matches start showing up, one can swipe these pictures to the left or right on the phone's capacitive touch screen – the intuitive, tactile and playful method of interfacing with the faces of others. Swiping left equals disinterest, swiping right the opposite. Only when the other party has reciprocated the 'like', the app shows that "It's A Match". The app is framed overtly as a game – the act of engaging with the app is colloquially referred to as 'playing *Tinder*', and the app itself, when a match has been made, asks the user to 'chat now' or 'keep playing' (see Figure 1).

[228] This 'distance' parameter can be set somewhere between 2 and 160km at the time of writing.

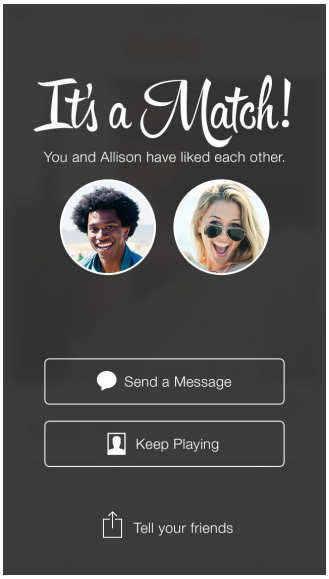

Figure 1. Tinder match[229]

As the advertisement video shows, *Tinder* is increasingly branding itself as a cosmopolitan dating app, allowing its users to feel 'at home' through dating the exposed local. We can in fact regard it as a travel app, and the profiles and catchphrase-like self-descriptions that are part of it as a multimedial portfolio that captures essential information about the user. It also comes as no surprise, then, that *Tinder* is often portrayed – including by its own users – as a means-end instrumentalization and commoditization of social relationships, very much akin to the criticism of the touristic attitude. Braziel (2015: 2), for instance, reports in her ethnographic inquiry into the motivations of *Tinder* users that "[t]heir conceptualization of the app as a stigmatized fantasy space initially spurs them to view others on the app in a distancing and objectifying framework; it is in this way that their app use finds a powerful metaphor in tourism." This comparison is apt for more reasons that Braziel takes note of. The objectivizing gaze, which functions similarly to Urry's 'tourist gaze', is only one component of the social dynamics of tourism: other vital elements are the suspension of one's own otherness, the integration into a foreign place, and the experience of locality that is to be achieved.

These elements come to the fore especially in the dynamics of *Tinder Plus,* which was introduced in March 2015, and constituted the app's first attempt at direct user monetization. 'The next level of *Tinder*', as the company itself playfully puts it, allows the user, for a fixed price per month (which is dependent on the age of the user), to use the *Rewind* option in order to take back their last swipes, and – more to the point

[229] See http://www.newyorkdatinglife.com/%EF%BB%BFfinding-love-on-tinder-a-myth/

– to change her location (and thus the radius in which possible matches are found) to any other place on the planet, regardless of her corporeal whereabouts. Users can thereby start connecting with people in cities they plan to visit in the future. This function of changing one's location is labeled the *Passport* function. Through it, the app constructs different experiential modalities for its users; relations *with* the places that they are having relations *in*.

On its blog, *Tinder* developers compare the feature to 'teleporting to a different location' (Tinder 2015). The immediate and incorporeal transposition of the user, magnifying her opportunities to find others in faraway or exotic locations, answers to the fluidity and seamlessness of social dynamics in contemporary tourism: this app allows the traveler not just to have activities but romantically interested people 'at the ready' as one travels abroad. Paying users is endowed with translocality: they no longer have to go through the physical inconvenience of going to bars, they do not have to be faced with the gaze of strangers, or the potentially uncomfortable interactions that may result from it, before even thinking about engaging in any travel romance. The seamless experience of comparing, evaluating, swiping and chatting allow them to fit in romance at they see fit. The regular *Tinder* tourist, in other words, only gets to know the opportunities on the spot; yet the disembodied, translocal traveler knows everything she would want to know once she is actually there. This is a perfect example of how virtual and corporeal orientations mesh and interact. As such, *Tinder* exemplifies a travel figure in and of itself: the playfully swiping, hypermobile global nomad, always on the lookout for opportunity. These dynamics may be said to oppose everything that is traditionally considered romantic traveling. Yet at the same time, the playfulness of the app is also part of a dating culture in which individuals may take control of their persona, and take part in forms of 'empowered exhibitionism' (cf. Koskela 2004) – thereby asserting themselves in wholly different ways than they might have in meatspace.

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CHAPTER 6

Discussion

This dissertation started with a definition of the travel script – a procedural frame for regarding forms of reading, writing and executing travel discourses in algorithmic culture. Scripts, to reiterate, are computationally interfaced performances and interactions from which certain social relations arise. Through the analysis of three distinct but overlapping computational contexts, we then saw that the processes of reading, writing and executing travel are of a different order than typical studies of travel writing allow for. We will now provide a resume of the core argumentative line as it has developed.

First, the case of professional travel blogging was considered: a social practice involving intersecting forms of existential sensibilities, doxic imagery, and strategic self-management. We saw how bloggers show their audiences how to be a successful traveler – and more broadly, a fulfilled human individual – through a structurally consistent blogging format. We also saw a fundamental dissatisfaction with the roles that late modern society provides, while at the same time, the logic of that very society is apparent within the narratives that are supposed to offer an alternative. Bloggers insert discursive features and culturally recognizable personae in order to successfully brand themselves, thereby showing how the existential authentic experience becomes a communicative resource in the process of self-branding. This self-branding, in other words, occurs *with* and *through* forms of existential authenticity. The form by which this intersection takes place we can consider a travel script. It is a script that implicates two seemingly disparate discourses coinciding and consolidating each other through a number of visual and discursive frames for traveling, couched in specific interactive configurations for author and audience. We see a striking resemblance if we compare these forms, which goes against contributions such as those by Karpf (2011), who notes that the single 'blogosphere' with its common software architecture and technological affordances has scattered into different communities and platforms. Nowadays, he states, blogging simply refers to writing content online in all its manifestations. Yet, (rightfully) doing away with durkheimian bathwater of a word such as 'the blogosphere' does not mean we should get rid of the proverbial child – that is, the material-semiotic fact that we can still plainly register structured mechanisms, genres etc. on the Internet. Professional travel blogs, both in programmatological structure and in discursive thematization, are notably similar to one another.

Second, we considered platformed environments, sites for peer-to-peer interaction in which insiders and 'locality' are produced. Insiders, in those constructivist

terms, exist by virtue of the fact that their identity, understood as commodity, can be consumed by the outsider/visitor. These types of activities are fundamentally connected to a shifting concept of what the Internet is and does, and how people use it. One could say that travelers are becoming so engrossed in previews, evaluations and discussions about their travel destinations that the travel itself – physical travel to a geographical location – is an ever-diminishing component of an experience dominated by digital engagement. The articles in this section further underscored the prevalence of anti-touristic attitudes within online forms of travel writing – of not wanting to be a tourist and leveraging increasingly fine-tuned platforms to attain these allegedly subversive modes of travel. The forms of travel writing that we find here are also travel scripts: discourses of anti-tourism and, concomitantly, authenticity, executed within an algorithmic and heteromated system of advertising. We noted that this is a paradoxical endeavor, as the fluidity, ease, immediacy and 'standing-reserve'[230] of mediated information yields the opposite to the ideological objective of authentic travel, characterized by the surprise, the unexpected, the involuntary. These modes of anti-touristic engagement running through immediate informational path-ways are, in fact, touristic: the tourist discourse involves prefixed understandings of where to go, and how to go about it, and many anti-touristic practices in distributed, platformed, online environments work through precisely the same logic. We also saw how the types of online, platformed travel writing seem to differ from their traditional counterparts when addressing the difference between two figures of identification, the 'pilgrim' and the 'tourist', in platformed travel blogs: it was suggested that the former's discourse involves utterances of surrender and *Gelassenheit*, while the latter, with great urgency, searches out and writes about a series of discontinuous and distinctly framed experiences. This shows that the kinds of engagement and experience that appear within those ecologies refract the understanding of these traveler types as they are based on more conventional forms of travel writing. Both pilgrim and tourist dis-

[230] The term is from Heidegger (1977): a translation from *Bestand*, which in English could also be rendered as the computational term of the *file*. Heidegger here discusses the instrumental orientation of technology. "Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately at hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering." Yet more than a matter of stock or resource, the status of standing-reserve means that something is "in its whole structure and in every one of its constituent parts […] on call for duty" (ibid.: 7-8). This technological relation to the world expands into other regions of our lives – a friendly chat, by the same token, becomes in its essence an opportunity for networking, and an anecdotal life narrative about living in a certain city on the P2P platforms in Section 2 becomes an expression of, and a possibility to appropriate, a form of authenticity. In other words, things in the world are not 'good' in and of themselves, but only 'good *for*' something. What is meant when we say that information itself becomes 'standing reserve' is that, far from being a non-binding, contingent opportunity for its users to get to know something about the world, information reveals a slice of the world as an ordered and on-call presence. Note, finally, that Heidegger adds that this "destining" or *Geschick* (ibid.: 12) of things means that man, as the person doing the destining, is free to do or refrain from doing so. "In this way we are already sojourning within the open space of destining, a destining that in no way confines us to a stultified compulsion to push on blindly with technology or, what comes to the same thing, to rebel helplessly against it and curse it as the work of the devil" (ibid.: 13).

courses are, after all, responses to a computational ecology within which they are written and read.

Third, we took our analysis to the virtual realm entirely, where we saw the very act of traveling become an interfaced, represented and semiotic act. We recognized, once more, the figure of the anti-tourist through which an 'authentic' relation to the traveled world was constructed. The figure emerged in a highly popular game series in which historical city- and landscapes were represented, and in which players were engaged in playing the anti-tourist by means of traversing this space. The other case study in this section involved a disembodied pilgrimage through a simulation of pilgrimesque types of movement, as well as a teleological direction for that locomotion. This brought players of the game to talk about liminoid experiences, in many ways mirroring the accounts of existential authenticity that were found in the discourses of corporeal travelers. The case study also showed that due to the immersive nature of current-day virtual environments, games offer a promise of a level of realistic involvement that follows similar principles of constructing a space for exploration, discovery and wish fulfillment. This manner of involvement also accounts for the rise and fall of 3D televisions and the current flourishing of virtual reality (VR) technology and applications, which, as of 2016, are becoming integrated into everyday life, contributing further to the blurring of game and life.

Scripts, in all of these instances, circumscribe behavioral navigations, the *path* of the self, and propose directions for their actors to follow, in order for them to satisfactorily latch on to dichotomous forms of identity. They do so in procedural and formal ways that are seemingly neutral and unbiased.[231] If one wants to become a 'travel expert', one needs to tend to specific elements that belong to the blog; if one wants to become a pilgrim in a videogame, one needs to follow specific procedural mechanics. The expert, the pilgrim, the anti-tourist: they offer different form of touristic engagement – for reading, writing and executing – from *within* the structure of tourism. Yet the formulation of these alternatives, as we saw, depends in many ways on the programmatological ecology within which they come to rise. We can thus recognize the tension between the ideology of the locomotion of travel and tourism – an outward and exploratory move – and the motion of 'immersion', where one descends into the algorithmic filter bubble instead of being displaced.

This of course says nothing of the individual subject beyond the interaction (which is a result of the analytical scope of this analysis). The pilgrim and anti-tourist are no categories of subjectivity, but rather 'user categories': ways in which subjects as users and personas relate to the traveled world. It is the persona that is stabilized by the Boolean true/false logic that underpins scripts as computational frameworks. Here, we move beyond the realm of travel, into the matters of computationally aided epis-

[231] There are numerous examples that could be given, but we will restrict ourselves to one. Rasmus Lerdorf, the creator of PHP, has said his scripting language is "about as exciting as your toothbrush. You use it every day, it does the job, it is a simple tool, so what? Who would want to read about toothbrushes?" (see https://www.sitepoint.com/phps-creator-rasmus-lerdorf/2/, accessed 8 June 2016).

temology. Ours is a time in which computational procedures are inserted into human knowledge, social experience, and identity: all of these are measured, inferred and co-constructed by the everyday algorithmic systems in which they come to rise (cf. Mackenzie 2006; Cheney-Lippold 2011; Manovich 2013; Markham 2013). The natural language of the individual is encapsulated by a formal language, involving strict syntax and parsing rules, no room for ambiguity, and the tendency to not be verbose. Yet, while a fault in a computational script means the whole process cannot run, scripts are also extremely permutable, and change incessantly. The computer languages in which they are written are just as ephemeral. And yet, we have also seen that the ideological processes that the script engenders are not simply as erratic as their form. They also stabilize forms of identity and offer ways to produce it. Scripts influence the 'work of the imagination' (Appadurai 1996: 3): they consist of different kinds of resources and procedures for the construction of imagined selves and worlds – or as Appadurai calls them, "scripts for possible lives" (1996: 3).[232] Scripts, in other words, are unpredictable, flexible and iterative compositions (*inter-script*) yet intensely conductive (*intra-script*). They insulate and secure the late modern individual from the fragmented, randomized problems and events that arise in everyday life.

Perhaps, then, we can postulate a Weberian 'elective affinity' between the ideologies of authentic travel and the configuration of algorithmic culture. These two phenomena, after all, find and reinforce each other in their shared mechanics of spontaneity – or more precisely, an algorithmic spontaneity.[233] This designates a specific paradoxical engagement with travel, and a fusion of online and offline dynamics. In one's online interactions, which precede, accompany and succeed our travels, one is interfacing with heteromated, efficient forms of information access, storage, and retrieval. Each problem one encounters is an invitation to be queried and resolved. The result, for the plugged-in individual in search of information, is a constant questioning.

[232] We might briefly refer to Searle's famous Chinese room thought experiment: the metaphor intended to challenge the possibility of 'strong AI' (where a machine's intellectual capability is functionally equal to a human's). In the scenario, a test subject is locked in a room with a batch of Chinese writing, which (s)he does not understand. The subject is also provided with a set of step-by-step set of instructions, a program – a script – written in English, to translate the Chinese writing. This will allow the subject to successfully translate the incoming messages, but Searle's point is that this translating cannot be confused with actually knowing the language. While this thought experiment is not quite convincing for Searle's original point about AI (see for instance Dennett 2013), it does indicate an epistemological worry deriving from the use of scripts and ordered computational procedures; namely, the irresolvable lack, the leftover of human creativity, which cannot be subsumed or substituted by such procedures.

[233] This notion of spontaneity builds upon the much-discussed 'homo optionis' (Beck 2002: 5-6) who considers herself caught in a constant stream of possibilities, potentialities and alternatives in thought and action, of which the individual is acutely aware. Especially the latter aspect leads Giddens to the concept of *reflexive individuality:* the societal process through which individuals start perpetually monitoring and scrutinizing themselves, thinking of themselves in terms of self-defined and self-orientated expectations, desires, perceptions, and meaning – and open to endless revision (Giddens 1991: 75; cf. Bauman 2000; Beck 2002). These individuals are therefore always critically and strategically anticipating and modeling a future. Algorithmic spontaneity connects to this modern, reflexive, 'condemned-to-be-free' individuality by offering pathways that are optimized for user-friendliness.

One has to choose: What do I think of this? Do I want this for myself? Can I trust this? Can I use this? It is a choice that needs to be made, and it often is to be made immediately. Yet the parameters of the question are continuously updated, every time a new search is performed, a new inquiry made, the choices one has are not the same.

In sum, we face a digital dependence that presents itself as self-possession and waywardness. What we have encountered in our case studies is a convergence in how individuals deal with digitally distributed information about travel on the one hand, and the way in which they think about travel itself on the other. Authenticity, in this context, is understood as the romantic obedience to the ingrained, impetuous and uncontrived aspects of human individuality – the haphazard and self-determined – yet this spontaneity can only be effectuated by the facilities and fluency of technological connection within carefully laid out, procedurally delineated systems. There is a permeation of implicit values and affects in this human-computational synergy.

We can ask what relation scripted interactions in the field of tourism have to the concept of late modernity. In one sense, they are in agreement with the formal-procedural logic informing many strands of life within modernity. Bauman writes in *Society under Siege* that modernity is about "making the world manageable, and [on] its daily management" (2002: 28). But while the procedural management of tourists on a societal level is more relevant than ever (as, after all, there are more tourists than ever), the experience that many tourists and travelers are displaying shows a more complex sensibility. The requirement of spontaneity befits a form of rationality that is an evolution of Weber's means-end rationality, which aspires towards a systematic, logically interconnected whole of knowledge (Weber calls this process *Versachlichung*, imperfectly translated to objectification as *Sachen* not just refers to 'things', but to business, and to matters of interest). Our current combination of formal procedures and spontaneous, affective, value-laden responses is then indicative of a different form of rationality altogether – for the sake of congruency we might opt for *scripted rationality*. This form is deeply paradoxical, due to its involvement of personas and procedures, of imagination and formalization.

Yet, such a form of rationality is not just a personal matter, but an infrastructural and technological one as well. This means that scripted rationality has implications beyond Weber's theory. Weber notes that most rationalization processes are rooted in personal interests, and thus fail to legitimize themselves at the level of values. This makes them, historically speaking, unstable – they are suppressed as soon as another more powerful constellation of interests appears at the horizon (Kalberg 1980: 1173). Further, Weber's formal rationalization remains limited to the 'professional sphere'. Formal rationality was not a methodical way of life; it remained typically circumscribed to the profession at hand (the bureaucrat may well rationally orient himself in a total different manner as soon as he leaves his office). But as the formal procedure becomes part of the infrastructure through which more and more types of communication are running, it is no longer confined to such work spheres. In other words, our form of rationality is acquiring a power that is *eigengesetzlich* (see

Tenbruck 1975), and which is capable to guide the beliefs and actions of the whole social stratum of the plugged-in, middle-class public.

We can then restate, without giving due answers, the question with which Weber ended his seminal work about the Protestant work ethic: what *Menschentyp* is capacious to survive in this modern world? Which personalities are accommodated by the times they live in, and which personalities will find themselves troubled in maintaining their footing? The attitudes toward travel as we have encountered them are homologous to the broader ideological connection between work and play (or business and pleasure – 'bleisure') that characterizes the discourse of the entreflâneurial class. Under this logic, there is no distinction between leisure and work: one wins a contract; one relaxes working out in the Fit Lounge; one searches for fun in between working sessions; one checks professional e-mails when away on vacation. No line is drawn between business and fun – business is fun. This world is one in which the moral danger is not simply one of Weberian petrification, or one of Baumanian restlessness and opportunity. It is rather the danger of continuous and spurious directionality in knowing and interacting, a petrifying opportunity. The book on those who are sensitive to the constant force of this fluid and formalistically underpinned distribution of knowledge, who find themselves both continuously surfing for information and caught in the effervescent web, remains to be written.

Yet despite those concerns, the potential for agency in these new forms of travel writing needs to be stressed. Systems of formatted knowledge are a feature of the time we live in, and the individual sees herself tasked with composing the self through these formats. This means not just learning how to use scripts, but how to manipulate them: the latter especially is an appeal to creativity. Tourism and travel writing, of course, have always been about creativity, about finding ways to relate to the world with a sense of imagination, ingenuity, and self-ownership. Such efforts appear all the more relevant when they are couched in the formal systems of algorithmic culture.

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Tilburg Dissertations in Culture Studies

This list includes the doctoral dissertations that through their authors and/or supervisors are related to the Department of Culture Studies at the Tilburg University School of Humanities. The dissertations cover the broad field of contemporary sociocultural change in domains such as language and communication, performing arts, social and spiritual ritualization, media and politics.

1 Sander Bax. *De taak van de schrijver. Het poëticale debat in de Nederlandse literatuur (1968-1985)*. Supervisors: Jaap Goedegebuure and Odile Heynders, 23 May 2007.

2 Tamara van Schilt-Mol. *Differential item functioning en itembias in de cito-eindtoets basisonderwijs. Oorzaken van onbedoelde moeilijkheden in toetsopgaven voor leerlingen van Turkse en Marokkaanse afkomst*. Supervisors: Ton Vallen and Henny Uiterwijk, 20 June 2007.

3 Mustafa Güleç. *Differences in Similarities: A comparative study on Turkish language achievement and proficiency in a Dutch migration context*. Supervisors: Guus Extra and Kutlay Yağmur, 25 June 2007.

4 Massimiliano Spotti. *Developing identities: Identity construction in multicultural primary classrooms in The Netherlands and Flanders*. Supervisors: Sjaak Kroon and Guus Extra, 23 November 2007.

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